

The Clemente Course in the Humanities and Critical Pedagogy:
A Comparative Analysis of Earl Shorris and bell hooks
on Poverty, Racism, Imperialism and Patriarchy

by

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Social Justice and Equity Studies

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Abstract

The Clemente Course in the Humanities is an anti-poverty intervention for adults who self-identify as “poor” and humanities instructors. The course was created in 1995 by journalist Earl Shorris, who based the curriculum on a Socratic method of pedagogy and the “great books” canon of Robert Hutchins. It began as a community-based initiative in urban US settings, but since 1997 Mayan, Yup’ik and Cherokee iterations have been created, as well as on-campus bridge courses for non-traditional students to explore college-level education in Canada and the USA.

The course potentially conflicts with critical pedagogy because the critical theories of Paulo Freire and contemporary cultural studies reject traditional notions of both the canon and teaching. However, a comparison between Shorris’ and bell hooks’ theories of oppression reveals significant similarities between his “surround of force” and her “capitalist imperialist white supremacist patriarchy,” with implications for liberal studies and critical pedagogy.

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Chapter 1: Comparing the Clemente Course in the Humanities and the Pedagogy of Earl Shorris to the Engaged Pedagogy of bell hooks

Since 1995 postsecondary educators throughout North America have been awakening to a new mission: to move Socratic pedagogy and the western canon from liberal arts colleges and into communities where people generally live at or below the poverty line, in order to undo some of the dehumanizing effects of poverty. The initiator of this movement, Earl Shorris, a journalist and contributing editor for *Harper's Magazine*, wrote about his experiences organizing an anti-poverty humanities program in the 1997 book *New American Blues: A Journey Through Poverty to Democracy*.¹ Therein Shorris proposes two radical challenges to intelligentsia who are connected with liberal arts teaching and have concerns about poverty in their wider communities. First, he proposes a new theory of poverty generated by his analysis of interviews with over 800 families living below the federal poverty line in the USA. His interviews constitute a nation-wide portrait of citizens living in an enforced anomie, whereby the late twentieth-century poor are denied their intellectual potentials and their right to political fulfillment.² Second, he proposes that he has found a way to reaffirm the intellectual power and the political voice of the poor by creating an adult education intervention called the Clemente Course in the Humanities in the public spaces built by and for marginalized communities.³

¹ Earl Shorris, *New American Blues: A Journey Through Poverty to Democracy* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997).

² Shorris, *Blues*, 83.

³ Shorris, *Blues*, 334, 353.

While Shorris was recalibrating a traditional “greats books” approach to education for antipoverty work in the mid-1990s, another educational movement known as critical pedagogy was gathering momentum inside colleges. Critical pedagogy has since become a widely recognized standard pedagogical category for mobilizing formal learning toward radical opposition to oppression such as institutional poverty. Critical pedagogy makes theoretical and pedagogical incursions into colleges, challenging the status quo by questioning the political assumptions of whom education should serve. As well, critical pedagogues challenge the political authority of college syllabi by recommending interventions against the ideological baggage carried by traditional texts like those that appear in *The Harvard Classics* series and that Shorris uses. They suggest non-traditional replacement texts from other cultures and popular culture, as well as the need to produce new canonical writing that reinterprets class hierarchies, decolonizes the reader, is sensitive to racial identities, and feminizes the patriarchal narratives that define political associations at the turn of the twenty-first century.

Critical pedagogy is commonly understood to be opposed to the liberal studies version of humanities that Shorris uses in the Clemente Course. The usual critical pedagogical argument against the classical humanities is that the modern Socratic method is naive for using open-ended questioning and a focus on primary texts alone. Instead, critical pedagogy assumes that to interrogate texts in a fashion that does not dominate the working class (or racial minorities, or women) requires more overt use of critical theory. Furthermore, critical pedagogy is often held up as a rejection of the conservative culture of elitism that the traditional canon and liberal arts espouse on many North American campuses. This critical rejection tends to extend the conservative image to all liberal

studies humanities programs, and some secondary scholarship about the Clemente Course follows suit. This thesis argues that a comparison of Earl Shorris' writing about the Clemente Course in the Humanities with an example of a major critical pedagogue, in this case bell hooks, will demonstrate that a liberal studies approach to antipoverty education is actually quite similar to critical pedagogy. There is not enough room in this thesis to argue the specific similarities and differences in their approaches to canonicity and classroom interventions. What will be argued is that Shorris' pedagogy is founded on a theory of oppression that is compatible with that of bell hooks and therefore is close to critical pedagogy in general, despite their different archetypes of subversive political dialogue and their different attitudes toward canonical literature, racism and patriarchy.

Earl Shorris and the Clemente Course in the Humanities

The Clemente Course began in 1995 by recruiting educators who could qualify for tenure in college settings to teach students whose total household (or homeless) incomes would be no more than 150% of the federal poverty line. The Clemente Course is an eight-month series of classes, readings, written assignments and most importantly seminars based on the Great Books style of liberal studies as taught at the University of Chicago in the mid-twentieth century. Originally the classes covered philosophy, literature, art, history and logic, but different instructors and locations for the course have prompted swapping out logic for language courses, and revisions to the texts read on the original syllabi.⁴ What any incarnation of the Clemente Course is supposed to retain is Shorris' claim in a *Harper's Magazine* article drawn from sections of *New American*

⁴ To illustrate the diversity in authorship and origins of modified syllabi, Shorris has added samples to his book *Riches for the Poor*. See: Earl Shorris, *Riches for the Poor* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000), 200-215.

Blues that Socratic dialogue and the great books can be a welcomed “As a Weapon in the Hands of the Restless Poor.”⁵

The weapon with which Shorris arms the poor is political autonomy, based on their participation in reading, reflection, and public dialogue that intervenes in elitist discourses.⁶ Through education, he is offering economically disadvantaged people tools for contributing to public discourse in a way that is recognizably legitimate to the powerbrokers and decision makers who otherwise control them. Once they become familiar with formal logic and argumentation, writing essays to develop responses to political questions generated in seminars and texts, and practising Socratic dialogue, Shorris maintains that people who live in poverty will have the means to intervene in the public debates where power over them is decided and directed.⁷ He argues that liberal studies affords everyone the tools for reflecting alone and as a community to become their own advocates in the public sphere, independently of government agencies and charities. Shorris suggests that those people who live in poverty but also have the dialectical tools to affect the decisions of their communities will be able to assert themselves as democratic participants. Therefore, when threatened by the systemic changes implied by the demands of the poor, government and social institutions can be made to serve them. In theory, this will contribute to breaking cycles of multigenerational poverty.⁸

Dialectical reasoning in the classical mode of Socratic dialogue is central to Shorris’ pedagogical framework because argument and dialogue are tools for self-

⁵ Earl Shorris, “On the Uses of a Liberal Education: II. As a Weapon in the Hands of the Restless Poor,” *Harper’s Magazine*, September 1997, 50-59.

⁶ Shorris, *Riches*, 5-8.

⁷ Shorris, *Riches*, 173-184.

⁸ Shorris, *Riches*, 28-33, 256.

government that are restricted among the poor but are commonly applied by more affluent educated Americans. However, canonicity is also central to Shorris' ideal politics. In his 2004 book *The Life and Times of Mexico* he asserts that a requirement of US politics is for the public to "see the origins of [a country's] parts and inspect the places where they fit or do not fit together, where it is complete and where it still struggles."⁹ In other words, the contemporary generation must dialogue constantly on how the political origins of the nation-state they live in apply or do not apply to them, and take appropriate action in their communities. Shorris seeks to facilitate knowledge of the political origins of the USA through a syllabus based on the western canon from the University of Chicago's Great Books curriculum. He theorizes that communities that live in poverty are denied access to meaningful historical connections and dissuaded from engaging in critical thought because there are social forces applied by wealthy institutions and individuals that disconnect the poor from historical argument. Shorris wishes to combat the institutions and images that limit the political imaginations of the poor to simply reacting in the present by offering them the opportunity to form meaningful, relevant connections to the ideas that challenge the foundations of their polis.¹⁰

Shorris' word for the radicalized benefit that he offers the poor is "dignity."¹¹ He does not suggest a quiet dignity of suffering or forbearance that reinscribes the hegemonic manners of an unjust social hierarchy. The dignity that the Clemente Course nurtures is a self-image that is connected to ideas outside its own immediate situation, coupled with the power of being heard. Someone who helps to move ideas and decide on action in his or her community is dignified by Shorris' standard. Given the time and

⁹ Earl Shorris, *The Life and Times of Mexico* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004), 5.

¹⁰ Shorris, *Riches*, 106, 125.

¹¹ Shorris, *Riches*, 174.

space to be reflective, with the right materials, a dignified person can reflect on the arguments of the powerful and suggest alternatives. When made by a convincing member of a political community, those alternatives are not ignored. Shorris asserts that merely the threat of “legitimate” political voices from the margins of poverty is enough to provoke oppressive institutions to negotiate and concede the personhood of the poor. Then, the oppressive nature of poverty will begin to change.¹²

Cross-continental publicity for the Clemente Course began with an essay by Earl Shorris in a dedicated special edition from 1997 of *Harper's Magazine* called “On the Use of a Liberal Education.” In an accompanying article entitled “As Lite Entertainment for Bored College Students” Professor Mark Edmundson considers liberal education in the form of a college program based on Socratic dialogue.¹³ Shorris’ article considers it as an antipoverty intervention that resists oppression with the Socratic method of teaching mostly through dialogue about major texts of the western canon.

Edmundson’s essay describes the failure of college programs. He defends college instructors as radical readers who want to subvert the myths and assumptions that students absorb from a life of middle class consumption. He considers college programs to be mostly a failure from the instructors’ points of view. He reports that students assume they will pass classes because they have some kind of comfortable, unquestioning destiny to achieve quiet mediocrity, as though mediocrity is the goal of liberal arts.

¹² Shorris, *Riches*, 255-256. Shorris’ choice of the phrase “legitimate politics” is difficult to interpret through his short references to Hegel, Kant, and other political theorists. His use of the phrase “legitimate politics” is also connected to three decades of journalism aimed at contrasting the failures of “multicultural” activism and political economy with the rise of Reaganomics and Allan Bloom’s popularity. The arguments from his journalism are drastically cut short in his discussion of the Clemente Course. “Legitimate politics” will be discussed in this thesis only briefly but readers might find his use of “legitimate politics” more compelling or problematic in *Riches*, 82-83.

¹³ Mark Edmundson, “On the Uses of a Liberal Education: I. As Lite Entertainment for Bored College Students,” *Harper's Magazine*, September 1997, 39-49.

Students are embarrassed to talk in Edmundson's classes and avoid reading anything, because they devalue intellectual activity and promote conformity and obedience to commercial lifestyles that they receive pre-packaged by media and the college administration. Administrators also pressure Edmundson and his peers by promising students an entertaining campus experience rather than support their instructors' teaching methods.

Contrasted against Edmundson's report is Shorris' essay "As a Weapon in the Hands of the Restless Poor," documenting the experiences of students in the first 8-month Clemente Course in 1995 at a community center built by and for marginalized Latino immigrants in New York City. None of the students Shorris reports about have access to the middle class comforts offered to Edmundson's students. Unlike Edmundson's uninterested students who refuse to entertain the notion that literature might affect their images of themselves and their society, Shorris' students are intensely engaged. He reports that they identify the realities of their own lives in the narratives of the canon and that they work hard to reflect on their relationships to the philosophical roots of American culture using freshly taught skills in writing and argumentation. In class, his students cry when the texts hit too close to home,¹⁴ and they argumentatively challenge texts that present narratives that reinforce racism or domination.¹⁵ They phone instructors, Shorris included, after hours to talk about their lives and the books in the curriculum.¹⁶

At times Shorris feels like his instructors are more like social workers than philosophers, but the actions they take to provide food, transport and political space for the students is considered by him to be necessary components of a pedagogy that

¹⁴ Shorris, *Riches*, 141.

¹⁵ Shorris, *Riches*, 148, 149.

¹⁶ Shorris, *Riches*, 148.

dedicates instructors' time to dialogue and literature.¹⁷ According to Shorris, the canon and the great books style of liberal studies have a home outside of colleges, among people whose total living incomes are no more than 150% of the federal poverty line, but transitioning from an elite educated college to a marginalized location requires that the instructors become involved with the lives of the poor in their own environment.

New American Blues made very little difference to scholarly theories of poverty and oppression in the United States. The popularity of the Clemente Course on the other hand suggests that students act on a desperate need for dialogue and literary engagement outside of colleges and inside of communities traditionally disengaged from liberal arts programs. Since the special issue of *Harper's* was published, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of Clemente Courses and radical humanities programs inspired by Shorris' pedagogical writing. In 1995 there was only one course at the Roberto Clemente Family Guidance Center in Manhattan's lower east side.¹⁸ After 14 years, the course has spread across the USA and to Mexico, Australia, and Canada. The official Clemente Course, which is administered by Bard College in New Jersey, has 14 sites with around 300 students per year, about half of whom graduate with college credit. Of 1,950 graduates, 1,450 either have continued to study in four-year undergraduate college programs or expressed that they plan to do so.¹⁹ By the year 2000, modified indigenous versions of the Clemente Course were rebuilding native founding myths and attempting to decolonize humanities teaching in Mayan communities in the Yucatan,²⁰ in Cherokee

¹⁷ Shorris, *Riches*, 128.

¹⁸ Shorris, *Blues*, 355.

¹⁹ Bard College Course Calendar, 2009, 316-317.

²⁰ Shorris, *Riches*, 231.

communities,²¹ and a program for Yup'ik villages in Alaska.²² In Canada, by 2008 eleven programs were running²³ in British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario and Nova Scotia, although Canadian programs are mostly unconnected to Bard College's administrative hub. The diverse interest in the Clemente Course afforded Shorris an opportunity to excerpt the popular sections about the course itself from *New American Blues* in the year 2000 and repackage them as a book called *Riches for the Poor: The Clemente Course in the Humanities*. *Riches for the Poor* has become the principle text through which Shorris' pedagogical theory is transmitted.

Scholarly Discussion on the Clemente Course and Critical Pedagogy

This thesis is positioned within the controversy about whether or not the pedagogical theory of Earl Shorris is significantly different from or similar to critical pedagogy. Shorris' engagement with non-traditional students in order to oppose hegemonic oppression inside of non-traditional spaces has been compared to other established counter-hegemonic pedagogical theories. The most prominently compared teaching practice in scholarship on the Clemente Course is critical pedagogy. What makes the comparison between Shorris' liberal studies pedagogy and critical pedagogy intriguing is the polarized nature of the scholarship. Views about the relationship between the Clemente Course and critical pedagogy range from assertions that they are intimately

²¹ Shorris, *Riches*, 257.

²² Shorris, *Riches*, 240.

²³ Janet Groen, *Radical Adult Ed. Programs, Radical Humanities: A Coast to Coast Symposium* course syllabus, University of Calgary Faculty of Education Graduate Division of Educational Research, Fall 2008. Professor Groen also administrates a radical humanities website from the University of Alberta with Professor Tara Hyland-Russell. The webpage, www.radicalhumanities.ucalgary.ca, serves as a portal to network 8 of the current Canadian programs.

related²⁴ to suggestions that Shorris' pedagogical theory conflicts with critical pedagogy and must be rejected by progressive educators.²⁵

Scholarship about Shorris and the Clemente Course fits into two streams: the work of scholars looking for better ways to apply the humanities to social justice concerns, and the work of those who are directly critiquing the course. The liberal studies educators who are interested in ways to diversify left wing, progressive teaching opportunities in liberal arts by informing their pedagogies with critical pedagogy include Kevin Mattson, one of Clemente's earliest instructors. Mattson wrote about ways of simultaneously improving the course and creating dialogue between liberal arts programs and progressive political movements in 2002. Also, in a 2002 issue of *Philosophy of Education Yearbook* Benjamin Endres²⁶ and Landon Beyer²⁷ entered into a dialogue about the potential for progressive pedagogy in liberal studies. Endres argued that Shorris' off-campus course revealed significant parallels to critical pedagogy, but Beyer replied that the parallels were immaterial given that liberal studies are conservative bastions in colleges and critical pedagogy often disparages the canon used in their courses. Later on in 2004 University of Toronto researcher Tracy Lorraine Urban wrote a Master's thesis about learners in a Clemente-style course. She argued that the Socratic method of teaching is compatible with critical pedagogy's rejection of learning hierarchies, but that Shorris' articulation of the lived situations of the poor is

²⁴ Janet Groen, "Storefront 101: Intuitive Connections to the Traditions and Practices of Adult Education: Theorizing from the Literature," Paper presented at the Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education 2005 National Conference, London, Ontario, May 28-31, 2005.

²⁵ Jennifer Ng, "Antipoverty Policy Perspectives: A Historical Examination of the Transference of Social Scientific Thought and a Situated Critique of the Clemente Course," *Educational Studies: Journal of the American Educational Studies Association* 39: 1 (2006): 41.

²⁶ Benjamin Endres, "Critical Pedagogy and Liberal Education: Reconciling Tradition, Critique, and Democracy," *Philosophy of Education Yearbook* (2002): 59.

²⁷ Landon E. Beyer, "The Outcomes from Engaging Liberal Education and Critical Inquiry: Matrimony, Divorce, or Kissing Cousins?" *Philosophy of Education Yearbook* (2002): 69.

problematic.²⁸ In 2005 Suzanne Tardif, a Master's student from Lakehead University, in an analysis of how Lakehead could improve its own Clemente-based course for low income learners, included some brief comparisons to critical pedagogy.²⁹

Then there are educators concerned with antipoverty interventions who criticize the Clemente Course while theorizing their own pedagogies directed toward helping low income non-traditional students. These include four authors of articles that were published in *Educational Studies* in 2006. One of these authors, Jeanne Connell, was able to draw major connections between Shorris' pedagogical practice and critical pedagogy, but decided that the two projects have some fundamental conflicts.³⁰ Another, Jennifer Ng, argued in her article that despite his novel approach to poverty, Shorris' pedagogy parallels oppressive discourses in public policy and is therefore incommensurate with critical pedagogy. The other two *Educational Studies* authors, James Scott Johnston and Timothy L. Simpson, critiqued Shorris' image of Socrates but did not discuss critical pedagogy.³¹

Whether it is arguing for or against the comparability of Shorris' course and critical pedagogy, the literature suffers from a few shortcomings. Discussion of the Clemente Course is limited by using only *Riches for the Poor* as a source for Shorris' arguments, thereby missing important aspects of his thinking that appear in his other writing. Likewise, the literature uses only a limited range of texts to represent an

²⁸ Tracy Lorraine Urban, "The Lived Experience of Disadvantaged Students in a Liberal Arts Program: A Heuristic Inquiry" (MA thesis, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 2005).

²⁹ Suzanne Tardif, "A Formative Evaluation of 'Humanities 101 A Lakehead University Community Initiative': The Perspective of the Students" (MA thesis, Lakehead University, 2006).

³⁰ Jeanne M. Connell, "Can Those Who Live in Poverty Find Liberation through the Humanities? Or Is This Just a New Romance with an Old Model?" *Educational Studies: Journal of the American Educational Studies Association* 39:1 (2006): 15.

³¹ James Scott Johnston, and Timothy L. Simpson, "The Use of Socrates: Earl Shorris and the Quest for Political Emancipation through the Humanities." *Educational Studies: Journal of the American Educational Studies Association* 39:1 (2006), 26.

oversimplified critical pedagogy, notably some writing of Henry Giroux and Peter McLaren, and brief summaries of Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Formulating a deeper comparison of Shorris' pedagogy and critical pedagogy requires an expanded analysis of Shorris' literary corpus. Literature on critical pedagogy must also be used to provide more detail about what individual critical pedagogues consider radical or subversive.

Defining Critical Pedagogy and Great Books Pedagogy

Before writing more about the relationship between the Clemente Course and critical pedagogy, it is necessary to write more about critical pedagogy and great books pedagogy in North America. Despite the differences between the traditional theories and college-based communities in liberal studies and critical pedagogy, a thorough comparison of Earl Shorris and certain critical pedagogues reveals that liberal studies directed way from colleges and toward encounters with poverty in less privileged situations indeed shares many traits with critical pedagogy.

Based on a wide reading of major texts in the critical pedagogy canon, this thesis will define critical pedagogy as a five-part approach to adult education. First, critical pedagogues create a unique terminology to articulate problems of domination and oppression. Second, they combine their unique terminology with their own lived experiences as participants in an unjust society and as teachers and learners in what is called reflexive theory. Third, critical pedagogues attempt to remedy the injustices they have theorized with formalized teaching and learning that intervenes with the pedagogies of the status quo. Fourth, students are also expected to take part in the direction of their

resistance to oppression by defining the context of inquiry and the meaning of texts in classes with what is called generative theory. Fifth, what makes critical pedagogy “critical” is an emphasis on intervening with dominant society using logic and critical thinking, with impulses taken from the canon of critical theory, such as the writings of Marx, Gramsci, Habermas, Foucault, but especially Paulo Freire.

Critical pedagogues build on Paulo Freire’s theory from his classic book from 1970, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. In this book Freire argues that any wide ranging program for social change must include a revolutionary transformation of formal education in which “The oppressed...participate in developing the pedagogy of their liberation.”³² His argument as it applies directly to revolutionizing formal education in North America states that oppressive regimes transmit support for their unjust status quo by treating students as passive receivers of theories that justify dominant hierarchies of power.³³ Students thereby normally enter into complex social roles as oppressors and oppressed with little self-direction or opportunity to create alternative discourses. Instead, Freire expects students to enter into dialogue with instructors who ask questions about culture and daily life so that they can generate their own meanings and purposes independent of the power that dominates them. By reflecting on their own experiences and interrogating the elements of power present in a standardized curriculum, Freire assists students and instructors to reject their oppressors’ justifications of power and to reconsider their roles in seeking political fulfillment that engages the institutions of their society.³⁴

³² Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Continuum Books, New York, 2007), 48.

³³ Freire, *Oppressed*, 72.

³⁴ Freire, *Oppressed*, 85.

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* Freire develops his pedagogy by appropriating ideas he finds in Marxism, existentialism, and liberation theology. His Marxist theory concludes that learning and teaching are labours that rely on dialogical thinking shared between students and instructors.³⁵ The productive labour of learning creates knowledge,³⁶ while dialogue ensures that the knowledge created assists in praxis for everyone involved by transcending the hierarchies that are normally preserved by ordinary lecture and learning by rote.³⁷ His use of existentialist theory to lay the foundations for students and instructors reflecting on their political situations can help to commit people to change their social self-image by understanding texts as reflectors of their own intentions.³⁸ Furthermore, his existentialism rejects certain kinds of prescriptive Marxism by offering ways that reflecting on history can prove that the present status quo can be purposefully changed without being bonded to a pre-ordained cycle of history. Liberation theology leads Freire toward an inclusive, radical openness wherein people may expand who they associate with and assert the basic worthiness of human beings independently of social hierarchy.³⁹

Freire's theory, his language of education and liberation, and his practice change from one venue and time to another. The revolutionary pedagogy that he practiced in the 1960s that successfully fomented armed rebellion in rural Brazil had to change for him to work in exile during the 1970s with homeless people in New York City.⁴⁰ His methods changed again when he returned to Sao Paulo in the 1980s as bureaucratic head of the

³⁵ Freire, *Oppressed*, 69.

³⁶ Freire, *Oppressed*, 125.

³⁷ Freire, *Oppressed*, 84.

³⁸ Freire, *Oppressed*, 105.

³⁹ Freire, *Oppressed*, 89.

⁴⁰ Paulo Freire and Antonio Faundez, *Learning to Question: A Pedagogy of Liberation* (New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1989).

city board of education,⁴¹ and again in the 1990s as a tenured professor in the USA, until his death in 1997.⁴² Freire's pedagogy diversifies after *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and so does the literature generated by critical pedagogues who use his first major book as one of their own foundational texts. For instance, Henry Giroux adapts *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* to produce his border crossing critical pedagogy as a white male pedagogue in US high schools and Canadian university Cultural Studies programs.⁴³ bell hooks has adapted Freire's early work as part of the foundations of her awakening as a black insurgent intellectual US college educator. While *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is a foundational text in critical pedagogy, it does not define critical pedagogy. Freire's ideas evolved during his own career, and must be adapted by the lens of the pedagogue who applies it.

Inspired by Freire and various schools of critical theory, critical pedagogues use elements of Freire's pedagogy to resist oppression in their local learning spaces. Critical educators also incorporate reflexive theory into their own critical practice, generally seeing their interrogation of classroom experiences as part of their contributions to revolutionary knowledge production. Critical pedagogues develop their theories further by reflecting on their teaching and their experiences of oppression in their own biographies. They combine their reflections with elements of social theories to produce texts that are similar to multidisciplinary auto-ethnographies in order to create a unique vocabulary that can be used to identify elements of oppressive power in society as well as identify and redefine the social positions of victims of oppression. Critical pedagogues

⁴¹ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the City*, translated by Donaldo Macedo (New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1993).

⁴² Paulo Freire, *Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters to Those Who Dare Teach*, translated by Donaldo Macedo, Dale Koike, and Alexandre Oliveira (Boulder: Westview Press, 2005).

⁴³ Henry Giroux, *Border Crossings*, (New York: Routledge, 2005).

apply their unique vocabularies in several ways. Educators typically offer their theories as dialogic challenges to each other in order to build a community around anti-oppression theorization. Within their classrooms, North American critical pedagogues use their personal lexicons for anti-oppression theory to guide dialogue toward challenging the normal hierarchies of power that separate the politics of the rich from the limited political options of the poor.

The ideal setting for critical pedagogy is one in which students are encouraged to generate their own meanings for texts and learning exercises by comparing content to their personal experiences as mediated through the popular culture, social class, and other values of their own social groups. The hope of critical pedagogues is that when students begin to understand the content of their curriculum as well as their social relationships with that content, they will begin to position themselves inside the classroom with the agency to use the curriculum to challenge their social realities.

Different critical educators concentrate on some elements of critical pedagogy more than others. The American Joan Wink works with public school students by focusing on generative meaning and the way students can be empowered by redefining content.⁴⁴ In Canada, Henry Giroux concentrates his pedagogical theory on challenging the legitimacy of learning by rote and replacing the literary canon that transmits the historical arguments of the dominant classes with the popular culture and traditions of students.⁴⁵ At a university in California, Peter McLaren develops a combative rhetoric

⁴⁴ Joan Wink, *Critical Pedagogy: Notes from the Real World* (San Francisco: Pearson Education Inc., 2005).

⁴⁵ Henry Giroux, "Is There a Place for Cultural Studies in Colleges of Education?" in *Counternarratives: Cultural Studies and Critical Pedagogues in Postmodern Spaces*, eds. Henry Giroux, Colin Lankashear, Peter McLaren, Michael Peters (New York: Routledge, 1996), 41-58.

that attacks the violent interests of capital and the dehumanizing of impoverished Americans in high school and in the mass media.⁴⁶

McLaren's essay "Critical Pedagogy: A Look at the Major Concepts"⁴⁷ includes a criticism of the sort of humanities curriculum espoused by Shorris and other pedagogues who work in great books, humanities, or liberal studies traditions:

In order to understand the negative function of ideology, the concept must be linked to a theory of domination. ...[R]eification occurs when transitory historical states of affairs are presented as permanent, natural, and commonsensical – as if they exist outside of time. This has occurred to a certain extent with the current call for a national curriculum based on acquiring information about the "great books" so as to have a greater access to the dominant culture. These works are revered as high-status knowledge since purportedly the force of history has heralded them as such and placed them on books lists....⁴⁸

Even though this is a common position held by many critical pedagogues, McLaren's formulation is contradictory and confusing. He criticizes the curricula developed around the great books for being reified and reinscribing domination of the students because texts are presented "as if they exist outside of time" but also paradoxically "purportedly the force of history has heralded them." Canonical historical or ahistorical contextualization aside, McLaren's claims are confusing because it is extremely difficult to find liberal studies educators, either radical progressives or reactionary conservatives, who claim that the force of history justifies the elements of their canon, and he offers no examples.

Indeed, great books pedagogy has been dominated by conservative voices in US politics since the publication of Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* in 1987.⁴⁹ Bloom's right-wing opus is a two-pronged attack, first on the failures of radical leftist campus movements to produce equitable changes in administrative policies.

⁴⁶ Peter McLaren, *Cries From the Corridor: The New Suburban Ghettos* (Toronto: Methuen, 1980).

⁴⁷ Peter McLaren, "Critical Pedagogy: The Major Concepts," in eds. Darder, Baltodano, Torres, *The Critical Pedagogy Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 69.

⁴⁸ McLaren, "Concepts," 80.

⁴⁹ Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987).

Shorris pays particular attention to Bloom's second argument, an attack on the poor where he claims that colleges are meant to create aristocratic elites and that the great books canon is a mechanism for creating democratic aristocracies. Allan Bloom is effectively the spokesperson for the pedagogical elements of the conservative revolution that began with Ronald Reagan's administration and continued with the rise of the likes of Dick Cheney, Paul Wolfowitz, and Francis Fukuyama.⁵⁰ Right-wing great books pedagogues also include Harold Bloom, who claims in his book *How to Read and Why* (2000) that reading leads to personal praxis by engaging with writers. He argues that feminist and multiculturalist pedagogues reduce texts to material that test their own theories with no regard for authors' voices or potential for startling or novel arguments.⁵¹ Leo Strauss is another great books pedagogue whose seminars at the University of Chicago contributed readings of Plato that heavily influenced the intellectual discourses that have justified the policies of Republican White Houses since Reagan.⁵² Shorris accuses Strauss of creating a concept of political philosophy that uses obscurantism and totalitarian arguments from Plato to divide and conquer democratic nations.⁵³ Yet none of these conservative educators approach canonicity in the ways McLaren warns against.

Paradoxically, all those conservative educators (Allan Bloom, Harold Bloom, Francis Fukuyama, Leo Strauss) base their pedagogies on the great books curriculum developed by the left-wing mid-twentieth-century President of the University of Chicago,

⁵⁰ Earl Shorris, "Ignoble Liars: Leo Strauss, George Bush, and the Philosophy of Mass Deception," *Harper's Magazine*, June 2004.

⁵¹ Harold Bloom, *How to Read and Why* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000). The pre-eminence of two politically similar scholars named Bloom can lead to mistaken identities. Their nuanced literary theories diverge over matters of women authors, readings of race and critical theory, and most importantly for them perhaps the identity of readers and their purposes for reading.

⁵² For example, read: Leo Strauss, *On Plato's Symposium* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001).

⁵³ Shorris, "Ignoble Liars."

Robert Maynard Hutchins. Hutchins' concept of a collection of great books and a general education based on interrogating them is the foundation of what are now interchangeably referred to as college programs in classical humanities, great books, liberal studies, or sometimes just liberal arts or humanities, although the latter terms are also used for more general combinations of faculties.

In multiple books, Hutchins argued clearly and forcefully for a pedagogy that was egalitarian and anti-capitalist.⁵⁴ His arguments against capitalism reformulate the purpose of a college in a democratic society. He argues that no college can promise any program will lead to a job, and therefore many claims about the serviceability of programs that prepare students for the work world are false, but do manage to tie the students up in a useless four-year program to attain credentials for a labour market that may or may not exist when they graduate.⁵⁵ Instead, he proposes a curriculum that prepares students for a lifetime of reflection and critical thinking that engages their communities through text and dialogue.⁵⁶ He also argues against some of the capitalist functions of a university by rejecting the university's task of holding a reserve labour pool that is unemployed but busy for several years, to accommodate the labour shortages in an industrial economy.⁵⁷ Hutchins saw this as a waste of student time and instead developed his program of study to last only one year, so that the time-wasting busywork of courses that students normally eked past to get what he considered to be arbitrary class credits could be removed and

⁵⁴ Robert Maynard Hutchins, *The Learning Society* (New York: Praeger, 1968), 32.

See also: Robert Maynard Hutchins, *Some Observations on American Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), 99.

⁵⁵ Robert Maynard Hutchins, *The Higher Learning in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), 43. See also: Robert Maynard Hutchins, *Education for Freedom* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1943), 52.

⁵⁶ Hutchins, *Society*, 30; and *Freedom*, 60.

⁵⁷ Hutchins, *Society*, 7; and *Observations*, 62-63.

they could get on with the business of contributing to their own lives and communities.⁵⁸

He also claimed that the leisure class use of college as a site for students' professional networking was no better than time spent at a popular gym downtown or otherwise making friends in spare time. He also argued that a specialized curriculum was not necessary for most people's lives, and that he would choose a canon that made the widest possible contributions to the ongoing political challenges that students might encounter.⁵⁹ His insistence on primary sources for students was rooted directly in his objections to anti-Marxist rhetoric in the 1950s and 1960s. Hutchins relates that he would sit in conferences with government officials, academics, and dignitaries from every Ivy League college who would argue vehemently for capitalism's success and communism's downfall, but McCarthyism censored Marx's actual writing or rational debate.⁶⁰

Conversely, Russian and Chinese elites were not allowed to read beyond the official ideologies of their own national borders.⁶¹ For Hutchins, the Cold War was a nationalistic farce, and a vocational philistinism dictating the role of colleges to prepare vocational workers was to blame.⁶²

Hutchins' friend and student Mortimer Adler went on to champion his mentor's great books pedagogy by spearheading the Paedia Group, a left-wing network of teachers and policy critics who advocated a nationwide curriculum of the great books.⁶³ Adler argued that the great books in his experience are texts that can be used to teach anybody critical thinking skills, because they can be interrogated with the Socratic method and the

⁵⁸ Hutchins, *Freedom*, 61, 66.

⁵⁹ Hutchins, *Society*, 11-32.

⁶⁰ Hutchins, *Observations*, 50, 72.

⁶¹ Hutchins, *Society*, 62; and *Observations*, 72.

⁶² Hutchins, *Freedom*, 81.

⁶³ Mortimer J. Adler on behalf of the members of the Paedia Group, *The Paedia Proposal: An Educational Manifesto* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co, 1982).

Socratic method is extremely easy to use. Adler was so committed to the egalitarian public nature of the great books that he had a wildly successful newspaper column where readers from around the US, regardless of their access to college, would write in questions that they had about various perennial topics and Adler would reply in his column with some of the conflicting answers and open-ended questions that the *Harvard Classics* contain.⁶⁴ His goal in this enterprise was to blur the lines between popular culture and classical humanities.⁶⁵ Like Hutchins, Adler propagated a concept of canonicity as an historical record left for generations of common men (Hutchins never mentions women in college and Adler has no comment) to live well with an ordinary life. To defend his and Hutchins' progressive approach to the great books he wrote an entire book designed solely to refute Allan Bloom in 1988.⁶⁶ However, Bloom had more powerful politically connected media support with more effective popular rhetoric. Adler's opposition was weak in comparison.

What makes classical humanities texts canonical is often similar for conservative and progressive liberal studies educators. The texts themselves have reputations for catalyzing revolutionary and reactionary political movements throughout history. Sometimes they are aesthetic works of beauty, disgust, or other emotions. They often contain amazing examples of argumentation. They invite criticism, often because they belong at some radical level to a tradition that is connected to Socrates and the political dialogues of ancient Athens. Reputation alone is not enough to belong to a great books canon. Rather canonicity requires that the text can be interrogated using syllogistic logic

⁶⁴ The writers included in the *Harvard Classics* series are all European or American men.

⁶⁵ Mortimer J. Adler, *Great Ideas from the Great Books* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976).

⁶⁶ Mortimer J. Adler, *Reforming Education: The Opening of the American Mind* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1988).

and the questioning style that Socrates cultivated which is also sometimes called his maieutic method. Students and instructors are supposed to approach the texts as primary sources with a method of questioning that allows them to establish meaning and context, and not to read through another text that establishes the authoritative meaning of any argument for them.

For followers of Hutchins' pedagogy, Socrates is considered an example of a critical reader and dialectical political philosopher because he did not read through the lens of another theory but cultivated his intellectual life through dialogue with the other citizens of his city. He did not write any books, and his method is known only because it has inspired many texts and political thought over the centuries. According to this view, secondary sources are unimportant to the study of the great books because they are meant, with Socratic dialogue, to prepare students to be critically thinking citizens who can live better lives by continuing to engage texts that challenge their society. Engagement with primary texts is not meant to necessarily lead to more schooling or academic promotion. Hutchins did not envision possession of the classical texts and engagement with Socratic dialogue to define the social elite, either.

Critical pedagogy needs to offer a critique of elite views of the canon, but McLaren's is inadequate. Liberal studies arguments for the role of dominant discourse, or who that discourse belongs to, are as sophisticated as the subversive canons of critical pedagogy. This is especially true of Shorris, whose canon and Socratic approach to texts are rooted in Hutchins' protests against the pedagogies of Cold War class hierarchies.

A more focused critique can be found in the work of bell hooks, and this is one of the main reasons for comparing her social and pedagogical thought with that of Shorris.

She provides a substantial analysis of canonicity that connects the canon's historical context to the experiences of students. Her critique of the canon directly intervenes with the claims of great books pedagogues about critical political thought and ongoing postgraduate life, because her theory of canonicity is connected to her analysis of oppression in popular culture, public policy, and domestic life. Some conservative liberal studies educators such as Harold Bloom reject critical theory for replacing the arguments and images actually within texts with contemporary political arguments designed to justify or highlight some current political debate. hooks remains above that sort of conservative criticism by connecting critical reading to an embodied dialogue that she argues is essential for effective critical thinking and dialogue with an author. She challenges her students to formulate their vision of political contexts by paying attention to multiple voices of authors and readers, thereby protecting the authenticity of authorship from projected images from an outside source. Finally, if Shorris' pedagogy fails to arm the poor because he does not adequately address oppressive categories of white supremacy or patriarchy, then hooks' attention to those modes of oppression will reveal his pedagogical weaknesses.

Who is bell hooks?

bell hooks writes her reflexive theories with a different cultural focus than Earl Shorris and reflects on her own life experiences in order to enter into dialogue with students and college hierarchies,. bell hooks was born in Hopkinsville, Kentucky, in 1952. She received her B.A. from Stanford University in 1973, her M.A. in 1976 from the University of Wisconsin and her Ph.D. from the University of California, Santa Cruz

in 1983.⁶⁷ She is a critical educator and theorist whose “engaged pedagogy” is well suited to comparison with a liberal studies educator like Earl Shorris. hooks’ ongoing project includes developing a critical language about a matrix of oppression that consists of four elements: “the capitalist imperialist white supremacist patriarchy.”⁶⁸ Each element of her matrix categorizes the motives and the means by which people arrange themselves to exercise force as members of oppressive hierarchies in America. Roughly speaking, capitalism limits the choices poor people can make by diverting their resources toward meeting the bare necessities of life. Imperialism is a coordinated effort to replace historical identities and cultures with the images projected by conquerors. White supremacy includes ways in which people of all races are involved in reinscribing racist images that continue the domination of white traditional cultures over other categories of persons created by white discourses as weaker or less ideologically legitimate. Patriarchy includes ways in which households, businesses, and institutions are arranged so that gendered and sexual identities conform to scripted roles that benefit individuals who privilege maleness and masculinity instead of allowing for individual creativity and experimentation with social power.

hooks situates herself as a black insurgent intellectual woman who opposes the images and social relations that reinscribe domination. By reflecting on her experiences as a poor rural black girl who grew up to be an upper middle class public intellectual, she offers theory that melds her experiences with scholarly discourses and offers her students opportunities to personalize the content of her cultural studies classes. Her commitment to dialogical theory often takes the form of books that are transcripts of conversations,

⁶⁷ http://www.education.miami.edu/ep/contemporaryed/Bell_Hooks/bell_hooks.html

⁶⁸ bell hooks, *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope* (New York, Routledge, 2003), 1.

such as a chapter from *Outlaw Culture* where she converses with the rapper Ice Cube⁶⁹ or the book *Breaking Bread* which consists of two long dialogues with Professor Cornel West of Princeton University.⁷⁰ hooks demands that critical pedagogy always return to popular culture to locate how and what powers are being transmitted outside of formal education. Otherwise, she suggests that dialogue with students will be superficial.

hooks agrees with Paulo Freire's revolutionary dialectical descriptions of learning. However, her theory of praxis does not lead her to take on a role as an agitator or envision the transformation of her students into armed revolutionaries. Her transformative pedagogy is geared instead toward seeing herself as a writer whose literary life has been delayed so that she can address her community's need for a healer inside and outside of colleges. She assists her students in becoming critical thinkers by offering political solutions to their dysfunctional social relationships. In the process of tending to their psychical wounds, she hopes that she and her students will become politically dangerous through critical thinking about their present realities.⁷¹ Her spirituality, at first part of the black liberation theology of her family's church in Virginia, has evolved since she arrived at a California college at the height of the radical civil rights movement of the 1960s. She has continued to explore a personalized concept of healing that she has found in Buddhism that she finds satisfactory for opposing the capitalist imperialist white supremacist patriarchy.⁷² Her spiritual roots therefore include a Christian mission for idealized social transformation and a Buddhist mission for concrete changes to be made for individuals in their present moment. While she diverges

⁶⁹ bell hooks, "Ice Cube Culture" in *Outlaw Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 145-168.

⁷⁰ bell hooks and Cornel West, *Breaking Bread: Insurgent Black Intellectual Life* (Boston: South End Press, 1991).

⁷¹ hooks, *Teaching*, 14.

⁷² hooks, *Community*, 157.

from Freire by deemphasizing revolution in favour of healing, the healing she seeks does not indefinitely defer her students' potential for social change. Hypothetically, her healing mandate could be more immediate for a pedagogue than Freire's fomenting mass revolution or grinding the gears of bureaucratic institutions and political parties that contribute to oppression.

A major continuity between hooks and Shorris is that for hooks the literary canon that is usually referred to as the great books is not something to be totally replaced by popular culture and other traditions, but a collection of arguments from the dominant culture that should become a source of controversy for students. She does not argue that in order to intervene with narratives that inscribe cultures of poverty educators should dispose of the college canon in favour of contemporary culture that more obviously shapes present local concerns. She would rather see the canon expanded to include non-white and non-male voices, with representation from non-European cultures and colonized peoples, as well as a dedicated study of popular culture in order to contest images of normally uncontroversial capitalist imperialist white supremacist patriarchy. Traditional dominant texts are still valuable to her teaching toward praxis, as long as time is also spent in critical analysis that contrasts these with other historically important voices, as well as popular culture from the present that represents the arguments being made with contemporary images and locations.⁷³

How Shorris Interacts with the Radicalized Canon of Critical Pedagogy

Because hooks' pedagogy depends so heavily on reflexive theory, it would seem as though Shorris' pedagogy ought to be drastically removed from hers. Yet Shorris'

⁷³ hooks, *Teaching*, 167-175.

pedagogy comes into contact with critical pedagogy in ways related to the vocabulary he invents to analyze poverty, his notions of canonicity, his interpretation of critical theory as it relates to critical thinking, and his pedagogical solutions to poverty.

Although Shorris distances himself from the more revolutionary aspects of resistance that appear in Freire,⁷⁴ he does use his knowledge of Freire,⁷⁵ and for that matter the non-white theorist Franz Fanon,⁷⁶ the female theorist Hannah Arendt,⁷⁷ Emile Durkheim,⁷⁸ and Michel Foucault,⁷⁹ to theorize some of his basic pedagogical principles. Nevertheless, he does not identify his own work as critical pedagogy, which can be explained by his differentiation between his social theory and his pedagogical grounding in the classical canon of mostly Greek philosophers. He critiques the canon of critical pedagogical theorists in response to an educational initiative at Antioch College in California that defines itself in part in opposition to the classical canon:

It is interesting to compare the Antioch [Community Humanities Education course]--which opposes the Clemente Course from a point of view based on the ideas of Foucault and Marxist educational notions that first became popular a generation ago--to the criticism offered by *New York Times* cultural critic Edward Rothstein, who stands with Allan Bloom and the Leo Strauss school. Rothstein complains that the Clemente Course expects the humanities will lead students to become political, the public life of the citizen in a democracy, the *vita activa* so treasured by the Greeks, to his mind being somehow a debasement.⁸⁰

Shorris accepts antipoverty interventions “albeit gingerly” based on the canon of critical theory. Shorris himself wrote a vague but supportive review of Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* when it came out in 1971, and he spent the remaining years between then and now involved with progressive activists he encountered through his journalism and family connections with the Democratic Party. His difficulty with critical pedagogy is not

⁷⁴ Shorris, *Riches*, 39.

⁷⁵ Shorris, *Riches*, 47.

⁷⁶ Shorris, *Blues*, 83.

⁷⁷ Shorris, *Blues*, 70.

⁷⁸ Shorris, *Blues*, 84.

⁷⁹ Shorris, *Blues*, 190.

⁸⁰ Shorris, *Riches*, 223.

with its goals or theoretical content but that he interprets its practice as being in effect anti-Freirean. He believes that the Socratic model allows for students to generate their own interpretations of texts and apply them or challenge them in their own contemporary settings. He interprets the teaching of Giroux and the Antioch course to be based first on teaching the students to read like Marx, Foucault, and the theoretical canon of critical theory, and then on projecting that canonical literature's interpretations on the classical humanities canon and everything else they encounter. Shorris challenges the "critical" nature of critical pedagogy's reliance on a narrowly politically oriented theoretical canon. He likens critical pedagogues' narrowness to the interpretive filters of the radical conservative elements in liberal studies, who interpret the canon based on their own moralities rather than the texts' or students' reasons. However, Shorris seems to be analyzing critical pedagogy in the mode of McLaren rather than hooks. Indeed, his notion of conservative liberal studies canonicity overlaps his assessment of the instructor-directed reading at the Antioch course:

[H]e [Allan Bloom⁸¹] will permit the citizens to read only those works he deems good for them.... Furthermore the canon is not just the work, but the official, acceptable interpretation of the work. Therein lies the greatest distinction between the liberals and the fundamentalists: The humanities, as Protagoras taught, live; the dialogue never ends, the works never die. Like Socrates, who objected to the death of dialogue...humanities are the preparation for politics.⁸²

Shorris is uncomfortable with both critical pedagogy (as practised at Antioch College's Community Humanities Education course) and conservative humanities (as taught by Allan Bloom) for allowing instructors to act as censors who tell their students what they may safely read and interpreting the texts for them. His reasons for chaffing at critical

⁸¹ Shorris refers to Allan Bloom in this section. Harold Bloom's advice about reading is not quite as extreme in its rejection of critical theory and the two Blooms should not be confused.

⁸² Shorris, *Riches*, 111

pedagogy are too broad. If his pedagogy can compare favourably to hooks' engaged pedagogy, then his rejection of some critical "educational notions" can be corrected.

Like critical pedagogues, he begins his pedagogical theory by developing a unique vocabulary that describes poverty as the common factor he believes is shared by the most oppressed groups in the USA. He posits that the multigenerational poor are pushed into lives without personal choices in two ways. Through privation, the poor must fulfill obligations to other people or else something of value will be taken from them. Through oppression, the poor are threatened into submission because otherwise some horrible consequence will befall them. The poor are not given a legitimate political voice, so they are unable to reply to threats either by rejecting them or by fulfilling their assigned obligations. At any time, the unfair threats of privation and oppression can come true regardless of whether or not the victim fulfilled the obligation thrust upon him.⁸³ Shorris expands his interpretation of privations and oppressions into what he calls "the surround of force," twenty-five sources of threats frequently suffered by the poor that he saw evident in the lives of the people he interviewed for *New American Blues*. The surround of force includes "public housing, hunger, helpers, luck, intellectual muggings, modern feudalism, law, guns, hurrying and pressure, isolation, government, family violence, neighbours, graffiti, landlords, meanness, drugs, prison, criminals, illness, media, racism, police, selling, abuse, ethnic antagonisms."⁸⁴

The surround of force can be used to explain educational rifts between the poor and the rich. Shorris argues that a liberal education is one of the ways that wealthy Americans separate themselves from the cultures of poverty-stricken citizens that they

⁸³ Shorris, *Blues*, 37.

⁸⁴ Shorris, *Blues*, 97-200.

isolate with combinations of powers explicit in the surround of force. His argument is that the poor are deprived of a liberal education because they have not got the money to attend (or dress for, or plan for) college, nor the time to study or the leisure to prioritise attending classes or attending museums.⁸⁵ Also, they are deprived of an educated voice that could be considered legitimate both in public debates and in their internalized self-images. Shorris recounts meeting people who live below the poverty line and still enjoy Shakespeare and reading widely, but their families, friends, and people outside their homes use images in popular culture and institutions to ignore or insult their literacy.⁸⁶

Restricted access to liberal education is a potential means of oppression for Shorris. The poor are denied the ability to research problems and administer their solutions the way governments, teachers and the wealthy do in order to construct institutions that control them.⁸⁷ He emphasizes that the arguments made in public space that are considered to legitimize power are made in a common language that the wealthy study in liberal arts colleges.

Shorris' ideal for the Clemente Course is to remove the canon, the elite instructors, and dialogical thinking from American college spaces and place it into spaces in the lowest income communities he can find. Shorris hopes that thereby the Clemente Course in the Humanities will allow the poor to take possession of the cultural weapons wielded by the rich: reflection and dialogue will allow his students to intervene with the college educated instructors and catalyze a process of reform in various middle class institutions. This is the opposite direction of hooks' approach, which is to open up universities to formerly marginalized students, and to incorporate their points of view into

⁸⁵ Shorris, *Riches*, 98.

⁸⁶ Shorris, *Blues*, 127

⁸⁷ Shorris, *Riches*, 72.

the legitimate education that prepares the administrators of governments and innovators of the institutions that control them.

One of the elements of Shorris' pedagogy that intersects with critical pedagogy is that he created the Clemente Course in the Humanities using what critical pedagogues might recognize as a form of generative theory. His formal pedagogy comes from Robert Hutchins' assertions about education, Socrates' character in Plato's dialogues, and the Renaissance classification of liberal arts texts from Petrarch.⁸⁸ However, his theories of poverty and oppression are the result of interviews he conducted in the early 1990s as a male, middle-aged Jewish journalist with members of over 800 household living below the US federal poverty line, as well as Yup'ik, Mayan, and Cherokee community leaders.⁸⁹ His interviews are in addition to two decades of journalism concentrated on anti-colonial examinations of Native Americans and Latinos and progressive editorial critiques of capitalist political posturing in his work for *Harper's Magazine*.

His claim that liberal studies can be a way of practicing freedom in a democratic polity is rooted in his experience as a student of Robert Hutchins' pedagogy at the University of Chicago. That the classical canon should offer the poor any resistance to the surround of force, however, comes from his interviews with Vinience Walker, a woman who is serving life in prison.⁹⁰ Her commentary on how access to the fine arts, literature, and public discourse relate to the pressures of poverty emboldened Shorris to expand his series of interviews from a picture of poverty across the USA to become the foundations of an educational project. It was his questioning that prompted Walker to tell him that the

⁸⁸ Shorris, *Riches*, 119.

⁸⁹ Shorris had been in contact with the Maya and the Cherokee since the 1970s, but the indigenous iterations of the Clemente Course were created soon after the English-speaking versions.

⁹⁰ Shorris, *Riches*, 98-100, 117.

poor would benefit politically from access to elite culture and its dialectical uses.

Eventually named the Clemente Course, Shorris' experiment in making the humanities accessible is the synthesis of his interviews with the poor, his experiences as a journalist joining them in their own environments, and his knowledge about the sources of power that conservative and liberal elitist elements of society flaunt over the working class. His solution is to help poor people participate in the political life they are normally denied by connecting their political autonomy to a literature and learning practice that promotes autonomy instead of a life directed by institutional images.

His generative theory was developed using the narratives he encountered as a journalist examining poverty, and his college-inspired pedagogy reflects the literary interest and an argument for the liberal arts that came from his interviewees. His books *New American Blues* and *Riches for the Poor* are narratives about his own transformation through his encounters with his subject as a journalist and his transformation into an antipoverty educator committed to teaching toward democracy. His generative theory is unlike most critical pedagogues, who typically begin with their experiences in law⁹¹ or education and go on to challenge educational institutions from their positions as teachers or professors. However, his journey does mirror hooks' self-image as a writer called upon to educate for democracy through reflexive and generative theory.

How to Proceed and What Will Be Argued

What bell hooks provides in her engaged pedagogy is a much more manageable language for understanding oppression in the capitalist imperialist white supremacist

⁹¹ Paulo Freire realized that he needed to become an educator because of his experiences as a lawyer. Coincidentally, Robert Hutchins became a leading liberal studies educator because of his experiences in the Yale Law School.

patriarchy than Shorris offers in his twenty-five elements in the surround of force. Yet a close examination of each reveals that the capitalist imperialist white supremacist patriarchy is represented in the narratives from which Shorris constructs his conception of the surround of force. Shorris and hooks also share a common frame of resistance in that they each oppose the images that the poor are forced to conform to. They both offer the poor tools with which to subvert and escape those images. Neither he, nor she, are revolutionary pedagogues, but Shorris' challenge to restore dignity to the poor and hooks' challenge to heal the wounds they suffer from social oppression are goals that they both expect to attain through similar dialogical examinations of dominant culture. By examining a wide range of literature by Shorris and hooks that spans their entire careers, it also becomes apparent that hooks is open to using canonical literature in her engaged pedagogy and Shorris is open to replacing the canon with multicultural material. Coverage of these themes and issues is the subject of chapter 3.

In chapter 2 a review of the existing secondary literature that compares Shorris' writing to critical pedagogy will examine the specific questions that arise out of those comparisons. Finally, there will be some concluding remarks about the implications of the comparison.

Chapter 2: Review of Secondary Literature and the Relevance of Comparing hooks and Shorris

Scholarship about the Clemente Course in the Humanities has been published since 2002. Academic writers have directed their arguments toward dialogue between the Clemente Course's instructors and potential allies in other antipoverty education movements. For example, Ohio University Professor Kevin Mattson proposed in 2002 that the Clemente Course would not be able to reach a national audience without support from the funding and publicity of a federal political party.¹ Other researchers such as Tracy Lorraine Urban in 2005,² Suzanne Tardif in 2006,³ and James Johnston and Timothy Simpson in 2006⁴ have focused on dialogue with students in order to test the course's range of dialogical potential. Dialogues with agencies and students are part of a wider search for allies who resist the traditional canon's elitist posture within colleges and who oppose poverty in the community with dialogical education. Most of the efforts for finding this sort of ally have included some level of comparison between Earl Shorris' conception of liberal studies and broad generalizations about critical pedagogy. This larger conversation is nodded at by the aforementioned authors, and pursued directly by Benjamin Endres⁵ and Landon E. Beyer⁶ in a 2002 volume of *Philosophy of Education*,

¹ Kevin Mattson, "Teaching Democracy: Reflections on the Clemente Course in the Humanities, Higher Education, and Democracy," *The Good Society* 11:1 (2002): 80.

² Tracy Lorraine Urban, "The Lived Experience of Disadvantaged Students in a Liberal Arts Program: A Heuristic Inquiry" (MA thesis, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 2005).

³ Suzanne Tardif, "A Formative Evaluation of 'Humanities 101 A Lakehead University Community Initiative: The Perspective of the Students'" (MA thesis, Lakehead University, 2006).

⁴ James Scott Johnston and Timothy L. Simpson, "The Use of Socrates: Earl Shorris and the Quest for Political Emancipation through the Humanities," *Educational Studies: Journal of the American Educational Studies Association* 39:1 (2006): 26.

⁵ Benjamin Endres, "Critical Pedagogy and Liberal Education: Reconciling Tradition, Critique, and Democracy," *Philosophy of Education Yearbook* (2002): 59.

⁶ Landon E. Beyer, "The Outcomes from Engaging Liberal Education and Critical Inquiry: Matrimony, Divorce, or Kissing Cousins?" *Philosophy of Education Yearbook* (2002): 69.

by Janet Groen in 2005⁷ and in her ongoing analysis of the Clemente Course alone⁸ and with co-author Tara Hyland-Russell.⁹ Jeanne Connell¹⁰ and Jennifer Ng¹¹ also made comparisons between Shorris and critical pedagogy in a 2006 volume of *Educational Studies: Journal of the American Educational Studies Association*. Except for Mattson and Tardif, the literature suggests that the Clemente Course and Earl Shorris share some of the concerns of critical pedagogy. Overall, the literature suggests that the Clemente Course and critical pedagogy are allied forms of antipoverty pedagogy, but commentators give few examples of specific points of convergence. Ng even argues against a convergence of interests. The contrasts she perceives suggest Shorris fails to produce the oppositional theories demanded in critical pedagogy.

The secondary sources have been published in clumps. Tardif's MA thesis is from Lakehead University, Ontario, and responded to Urban's thesis of the previous year from the University of Toronto, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. Beyer addresses his article to Endres' readers. Connell, Ng, Johnston and Simpson are all juxtaposed in one volume. Groen and Hyland-Russell generate theory that identifies links between several Clemente-inspired "radical humanities" programs in Canada. A chronologically ordered

⁷ Janet Groen, "Storefront 101: Intuitive Connections to the Traditions and Practices of Adult Education: Theorizing from the Literature," Paper presented at the Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education 2005 National Conference, London, Ontario, May 28-31, 2005.

⁸ Janet Groen, "The Clemente Program and Calgary Alberta's Storefront 101: Intuitive Connections to the Traditions and Practices of Adult Education," *Convergence* 38: 2 (2005): 65.

⁹ Janet Groen and Tara Hyland-Russell, "Radical Humanities: Riches of Learning for Disenfranchised Adult Learners," Paper presented at the 5th International Conference on Research Work and Learning, Cape Town, South Africa, December 2-5, 2007, available at http://rw15.uwc.ac.za/usrfiles/users/99062813/documents/Groen_Janet_115.doc (accessed August 16, 2009). Groen and Hyland-Russell plan to publish further results from their research on Canadian radical humanities programs in the near future.

¹⁰ Jeanne M. Connell, "Can Those Who Live in Poverty Find Liberation through the Humanities? Or Is This Just a New Romance with an Old Model?" *Educational Studies: Journal of the American Educational Studies Association* 39:1 (2006): 15.

¹¹ Jennifer Ng, "Antipoverty Policy Perspectives: A Historical Examination of the Transference of Social Scientific Thought and a Situated Critique of the Clemente Course," *Educational Studies: Journal of the American Educational Studies Association* 39: 1 (2006): 41.

review of how each author compares Shorris' pedagogy to critical pedagogy will demonstrate the diversity of interest in the relationship between the Clemente Course and critical pedagogy and illustrate the need for a detailed examination of the similarities and differences between Shorris and hooks.

Review of the Secondary Literature

The earliest example of secondary scholarship about the Clemente Course comes from Kevin Mattson,¹² a left-leaning history professor and sportsman from Ohio University, whose publications appear in places like *The Baffler* and *Dissent Magazine*. He praises the Clemente Course and Shorris for creating spaces where marginalized citizens can debate their political histories and futures, while boldly rejecting the barriers to their formal education. However, Mattson sees weaknesses in the course. Insulated inside marginal space, he sees no way to connect Shorris' conception of liberal studies with his own activist agenda of broader social change. Furthermore, the retention rates of the Clemente Course are too low for Mattson or the course's funders, which demand stricter, more quantifiable measurements of progress than Socratic dialogue offers. His solution is to embrace the workfare and welfare programs that Shorris considers part of the surround of force. Shorris sees the Clemente Course as an alternative to workfare and job training, but Mattson suggests that the course can be a bridge between unemployment and state-sponsored technical skill programs. Mattson also would connect the course to a federal party's antipoverty mandate to achieve national influence, despite Shorris' arguments that party politics are part of the surround of force as well. While the

¹² Kevin Mattson, "Teaching Democracy: Reflections on the Clemente Course in the Humanities, Higher Education, and Democracy," *The Good Society* 11:1 (2002): 80-83.

secondary literature continues to question the limits of Shorris' pedagogy, Mattson's arguments rely on the presumed effectiveness of government and welfare institutions and have never been important in subsequent literature about the Clemente Course.

Unlike Mattson, Benjamin Endres and Landon Beyer began a dialogue that explores themes that concern most of the scholars that write about the Clemente Course after them. The 2002 *Philosophy of Education Yearbook* discussion between Endres in his essay "Critical Pedagogy and Liberal Education: Reconciling Tradition, Critique, and Democracy" and Beyer in his essay "The Outcomes from Engaging liberal Education and Critical Inquiry: Matrimony, Divorce, or Kissing Cousins?" mentions the Clemente Course as a politically dissenting alternative to teaching liberal studies in a college. Endres began his academic career by earning a BA in Philosophy, followed by PhD in Philosophy and Education, then served as a Professor at SUNY, New Paltz, where he taught courses such as Philosophy of Education, Multicultural Education, and the Social Foundations of Education from 2000-2006. He had a brief position as Adjunct Associate Professor of Sociology at Columbia University teaching Sociology of Education in 2007. He has written books on teaching as well as critical theory. He earned an MSW in 2009¹³ which implies potential interest in the Clemente Course from a social work perspective rather than purely an educational perspective. Beyer, a professor at Indiana University in 2002, responds to Endres based on his own teaching experience at three different liberal arts colleges.¹⁴ Their essays combine their experiences as professors and with theorizing liberal arts pedagogy to decide how confident they ought to be about the potential for liberal studies and critical pedagogy to influence each other. While they are both

¹³ SUNY of New Paltz Experts Database, "Benjamin Endres," SUNY of New Paltz, <http://www.newpaltz.edu/publicaffairs/experts/display.cfm?id=84> (accessed August 16, 2009).

¹⁴ Beyer, "Outcomes," 69.

convinced that the pedagogies are theoretically compatible, their experiences suggest that not all liberal arts faculties are likely to support critical pedagogy. In the case of funding bodies, Beyer suspects that they may not consider critical pedagogy legitimate liberal arts teaching.

In his essay Endres compares widely discussed pedagogical claims made by Robert Hutchins with claims made by Paulo Freire in order to argue “that critical pedagogy and liberal learning are not only compatible, but also mutually dependent, and that together they offer an alternative to education defined by preparation for occupational roles or cultural transmission.”¹⁵ He presents Hutchins’ curriculum as preparing students for ongoing personal inquiry after graduation as opposed to meeting institutional criteria for workforce training or academic promotion, by studying questions of government, religion, aesthetics, and other broad categories. While Hutchins claims that the “great books” contain the best answers to multitudinous philosophical questions (such as the best means to good government, or the value of aesthetics), that arise repeatedly in public discourse throughout history,¹⁶ Endres points out that the content of his canonical texts is not meant to overshadow the need to challenge the method of canonical authors, or to replace awareness of contemporary political situations. Endres acknowledges that whatever virtues ongoing inquiry might have, Hutchins’ canon is problematic because it is part of other, oppressive threads in western history.¹⁷ Hutchins and Endres both avoid reinforcing those threads through constant critique, and their dedication to Socrates’ maieutic inquiry ensures they do not define questions or answers in the political present purely by fishing for them in classical texts. Also, Hutchins’

¹⁵ Endres, “Reconciling,” 59.

¹⁶ Endres, “Reconciling,” 60.

¹⁷ Endres, “Reconciling,” 62.

dedication to an equal standard of education is central to the dissenting theme of his curriculum. However in order to bring that dissent more in line with critical pedagogy, Endres limits Hutchins' claim that Socratic inquiry is "the best" education for everybody to merely being beneficial for "most" students.¹⁸ The University of Chicago's Great Books program ideally is an alternative to capitalist-driven education that moulds students for their expected future occupations, defining their social and political potentials with images of social class and the benefits of technical skills, without prioritizing political participation and critical thinking.¹⁹

In Endres' experience, critical pedagogy seems unnecessarily at odds with Hutchins' writing because it has been interpreted at times to be grounded entirely in popular culture, students' experiences and political critique. Endres' agrees that critical pedagogy does include some examples of teaching (like Freire's rural literacy program in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*) that are directed toward a very specific local political cause that does not require classical text-based challenges. However, Endres sees Freire's historical grounding in Marx, and Freire's attention to empowering poor students to pursue their own social interests, as being reliant on a critical interpretation of tradition and culture beyond the student's political present. Endres considers critical pedagogy to be a form of ongoing public discussion about tradition, and that means even educational initiatives with narrow local analyses must include options for discussion and historical arguments of the sort Hutchins envisioned. Endres maintains that "there is no incompatibility between critical pedagogy and broadly humanistic subject matter like

¹⁸ Endres, "Reconciling," 61.

¹⁹ Endres, "Reconciling," 65.

literature, art, and science, even ‘classic’ texts in these domains of culture, if they are situated in a context that allows for students’ critical participation.”²⁰

He sees the Clemente Course as an embodiment of Hutchins’ goal that a democracy must educate all of its citizens not to fulfill the requirements of labour and class, but to position themselves as participants in an historical narrative in which every generation is empowered to achieve unique differences from tradition. The Clemente Course extends Hutchins’ vision by satisfying the need for a democratic education that attempts to reach lower income citizens.²¹ Meanwhile, Endres advocates a combination of liberal pedagogy’s historical texts and critical pedagogy’s attempt at critiquing everyday experience with unconventional politics. He sees educators combining democratic education and critically informed alternatives to the status quo, so that students of liberal studies and critical pedagogy can use the traditional canon as a mirror of the present to break away from institutional oppressions and gain control of their futures.

Beyer sympathizes with Endres’ politics but takes issue with his narrowly progressive interpretation of liberal studies. Beyer’s experiences with the teaching and the literature of liberal studies pedagogy underscores the prevalence of reactionary conservative pedagogues²² like Allan Bloom and his highly influential book *The Closing of the American Mind*,²³ and Vice President Dick Cheney’s wife Lynne Cheney, who has been the Chair of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) as well as a member of the Board of Directors of the Lockheed-Martin Group and the National

²⁰ Endres, “Reconciling,” 64.

²¹ Endres, “Reconciling,” 61.

²² Beyer, “Outcomes,” 70.

²³ Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987).

Security Study Group,²⁴ and has advocated for a shift away from global or multicultural humanities toward a right wing Americanization of liberal arts curricula. While Beyer sees the connection between theories of critical pedagogy and liberal studies that Endres foregrounds, he argues that commitment to Socratic dialogue and the canon are nevertheless just as capable of empowering an elitist college for imperialistic teaching. Nonetheless, he promotes Endres' goal of combined liberal studies and critical pedagogy, which is controversial given his assessment of the attitudes of the NEH.

Comparisons between the Clemente Course and critical pedagogy have been interesting to Canadian as well as US scholars. For her 2005 MA thesis, "The Lived Experience of Disadvantaged Students in a Liberal Arts Program: A Heuristic Inquiry," Tracy Lorraine Urban conducts a series of interviews with students from one of the Canadian radical humanities programs that are inspired by Shorris. Urban's concern is with Shorris' claims that the poor are unreflective and apolitical. She suspects that his claims are more of a prejudiced critique of the inner worlds of people who live in poverty than they are a critique of the effects of force upon the choices accessible by the poor.²⁵ Her interviews reveal that radical humanities students in the single Canadian course she examines have taken opportunities throughout their lives to participate in political organization and action, as well as to read, including occasional forays into literature.²⁶

Although she understands Shorris' book *Riches for the Poor* to be the source of pedagogical theory behind the radical humanities program, the program itself is significantly different from what Shorris proposed Clemente ought to be. For example,

²⁴ Sourcewatch, "Lynne Cheney," http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Lynne_Cheney (accessed August 16, 2009).

²⁵ Urban, "Experience," 138.

²⁶ Urban, "Experience," 146.

Urban is clear that her subjects are disadvantaged and marginalized people who are taking not-for-credit courses on a university campus, whereas Shorris constructed a course that is off-campus, in marginal meeting spaces. Urban takes issue with Shorris' description of the poor: "It is incorrect for Shorris to suggest reflective thinking plays little or no role in the lives of the poor. This attitude merely serves to perpetuate the myth that poor people are culturally or intellectually deficient."²⁷ Urban's interpretation of Shorris' statements about the situatedness of critical thinking in poverty may have been left unchallenged because she analyzed the experiences of Canadians whose class struggle is mediated by differently constructed images and intellectual, political, and social environments. Whereas Shorris found that images of domination in the USA were enforced so that the poor are deprived of opportunities for reflection and political action, Urban found that her Canadian "autodidactic" subjects expressed a lifelong learning experience closer to Hutchins' ideal engagement with texts and political discourse and Freire's ideal dissenting problematization of everyday life.

Urban makes two significant comparisons between Shorris' pedagogy and critical pedagogy. She acknowledges that Shorris' liberal studies approach implies an imperialistic agenda compared to Freire's insistence that radical education must begin with the popular culture of the poor. However, she observes the Socratic method of teaching is "not a form of top-down transmission. [Through the Socratic method] the humanities have the potential to lead students toward a critical consciousness of power, resistance and social justice" commensurate with the transformation of students sought by Freire.²⁸ From the small passage that she provides, it is difficult to ascertain how closely

²⁷ Urban, "Experience," 138.

²⁸ Urban, "Experience," 35.

she equates the Socratic method of Shorris to the critical dialogue of Freire, but she is clear that they agree enough to call the Socratic method a tool for critical consciousness.

Urban's second comparison is with the Marxist precursor to critical pedagogy, Antonio Gramsci. She identifies sympathies between Shorris and Gramsci in their mutual insistence that an elite western canon is central to the development of an intelligentsia that can agitate for social change outside of education and that the canon contains universal truths that are valid regardless of class or decade. She also sees parallels between Shorris' surround of force and Gramsci's concept of hegemony, and positions the Clemente Course as anti-hegemonic activism. Nevertheless, she cuts short the potential for a Shorris-Gramsci convergence because Shorris limits the political influence of his ideal instructors. Shorris teaches towards his vision of student autonomy instead of mobilization, whereas Gramsci would have "organic intellectuals" who teach and agitate with their working class students to mobilize some sort of revolution. Urban separates Shorris from the traditions of critical theory and critical pedagogy in part because of Shorris' reluctance to incite revolution the way Gramsci does.²⁹

However, her insistence on agitating students is awkward. She overstates the revolutionary aspects of critical pedagogy by focusing on Freire and Gramsci as epitomizing the goals of critical pedagogy whereas other educators use critical theory to heal, reform, and peacefully intervene with oppression. She is also understating the degree to which Shorris and radical humanities instructors envision their potential for participating in the lives of non-traditional students. Even though Shorris is uninterested in directing the ideological struggles students might undertake, he participates as a critical observer and supporter during times of crisis and celebration in their communities.

²⁹ Urban, "Experience," 32.

Another Canadian educator has developed her pedagogy by interrogating her experiences with Clemente-inspired radical humanities. Janet Groen is an education scholar who studies spirituality in the workplace and education, as well as writing short essays about Clemente-inspired radical humanities programs in Canada since 2005, and more recently coauthored papers with Professor Tara Hyland-Russell about the same programs. What began as a paper in the 2005 Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education National Conference became the essay “The Clemente Program and Calgary Alberta’s Storefront 101: Intuitive Connections to the Traditions and Practices of Adult Education” which is where she draws her most direct comparisons between Shorris and Paulo Freire. Their 2009 paper “Risky Business: Plato for the Poor?” begins with a short explanation of Shorris’ attachment to Socrates’ maieutic method, but then connects Plato and Socrates to the involvement of universities rather than following Shorris’ image of Socrates being active in the community.³⁰

In 2005, Groen uses to her own self-described “intuitive connections” in order to connect Shorris’ argument that critical reflection is a means to breaking cycles of poverty and changing political landscapes to Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* where he claims that reflection realises the human “ontological vocation” to philosophize.³¹ She finds potential for overlap between Shorris and Freire in Freire’s insistence that by taking the time to reflect critically on their lives instead of reacting to deprivations and privations, the poor will realize that the forces of capitalism and imperialism are incompatible with liberating themselves from oppression.³² Her further writing focuses on the use of Socratic method more than it does on the use of Shorris’ humanities canon. However, the

³⁰ Groen and Hyland-Russell, “Disenfranchised,” 2.

³¹ Groen, “Storefront,” 3.

³² Groen, “Storefront,” 4.

radical humanities programs she cites seem open to a sort of cultural hybridism that is close to hooks' cultural studies combinations of traditional texts and popular culture.

Following on the heels of Urban and Groen is a second Canadian graduate project about radical humanities, Suzanne Tardif's 2006 MA thesis from Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, "A Formative Evaluation of 'Humanities 101 A Lakehead University Community Initiative: The Perspective of the Students'. Tardif confusingly claims that Earl Shorris developed Humanities 101 at Lakehead and that Humanities 101 has been adopted by over 50 universities around the world.³³ Despite these factual errors, her thesis proposes new ways of measuring the progress of students through the Lakehead program, reinforcing the success of Canadian radical humanities initiatives to deliver college-level education that meets the expectations of non-traditional students.³⁴

Regardless of her problematic explanation of how Shorris' theory has evolved since *Riches for the Poor*, her thesis demonstrates a few important conditions in the evolution of the Clemente Course in the Humanities. In Canada, the mission that Shorris proposed in *New American Blues*, *Riches*, and in Harper's Magazine is evolving away from a mandate to subvert the conditions immediately in the communities under the influence of the surround of force to marginalize the poor. Shorris chose to engage the poor with promises of rewarding political reflection and an opportunity for a humanistic sense of dignity and personhood inside their own communities. Tardif's understanding of radical humanities focuses on Shorris' liaison with Bard College, which grants first-year college credits to Clemente Course graduates and ensures academic credentials of instructors. Her thesis takes that focus on college credit to accentuate the role of radical

³³ Tardif, "Evaluation," 1.

³⁴ Tardif, "Evaluation," 2.

humanities as a bridge course for non-traditional students to become official college students. She promotes the ability of Canadian radical educators to subvert the borders between poverty and affluence by helping the poor to access colleges.

In contrast to Tardif's work, the articles on the Clemente Course in *Educational Studies* (2006) focus on Shorris' pedagogy in particular, instead of following the research methods of previous scholarship that engage a particular Clemente Course student cohort or Clemente-style program. James Scott Johnston is a Professor at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, who writes about the democratization of education with a focus on John Dewey's influence, and "modes of inquiry" in ethics, aesthetics, science and political theory.³⁵ Timothy L. Simpson is a Professor of Education at Morehead State University in Kentucky. Their article "The Use of Socrates: Earl Shorris and Political Emancipation Through the Humanities" disputes the authenticity of Shorris' Socrates by comparing Shorris' stated goal, the political emancipation of the poor, with a close reading of Platonic texts wherein Socrates' goal is to seek the truth. Their contention is that Shorris' advocating of Socrates as a supporter of a democratic and open-ended method says nothing about the context for dialogue, so Shorris' Socratic method has the ironic potential to foster democratic thought without dissolving the surround of force.³⁶ They argue that Shorris is in fact advocating a vocational training for his students, based on argumentation and abstract theoretical foundations. Their conclusion is that Shorris confuses Socrates with a sophist, and they suggest several ways that his theory could be retooled to ensure that the poor benefit from the humanities in a way that helps them to

³⁵ James Scott Johnston, Faculty of Education, Queen's University, "James Scott Johnston," Queen's University, <http://educ.queensu.ca/faculty/profiles/johnstonj/> (accessed August 16, 2009).

³⁶ Johnston and Simpson, "Socrates," 28.

realize their potential as philosophical beings rather than teaching them to wield arguments as another form of force.³⁷

Johnston and Simpson have effectively turned the discussion about Shorris' pedagogy inside out. Instead of writing a meta-analysis of teaching practices from outside, they have offered the sort of argument that comes up in seminars about Platonic texts. The question "Who is Socrates?" inevitably leads to a tense debate about the potential to rank liberty and truth in philosophical context. However, they do not mention critical pedagogy. Therefore, a deeper discussion of their article cannot take place here. Yet, by interrogating some of the differences between hooks and Shorris, the context of location should emerge as one of the primary concerns in Shorris' writing, rather than something that Johnston and Simpson argue he ignores.

Another US scholar, Jeanne M. Connell is a lecturer at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Like Endres, she studies the philosophical roots of John Dewey, as well as reader-response-theory, and is a member of several philosophical societies and editorial boards for education journals.³⁸ Her article "Can Those Who Live in Poverty Find Liberation Through the Humanities? Or is This Just A New Romance With an Old Model?" problematically resolves her question. She states,

It is not precisely clear what elements of the Clemente Course contributed most to improved outcomes for students who completed the program. The Clemente Course does not convincingly prove that its curriculum, a classically inspired study in the humanities, served as a catalyst to help those who are poor to "save" themselves. What is clear is that those who remained in the course found ways to change their lives.³⁹

³⁷ Johnston and Simpson, "Socrates," 38.

³⁸ College of Education Faculty Research Profiles, "Faculty Research Profiles: Jeanne Connell," University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, <http://education.illinois.edu/frp/C/jmconnel> (accessed August 16, 2009).

³⁹ Connell, "New Romance," 22.

However, her conclusion is in opposition to Shorris (and Hutchins) while reinforcing a possible argument for the Canadian trend to bring Clemente on campus:

While Shorris maintained that the goal of the program is not to provide college preparation but to focus on developing intellectual skills, the program ultimately functioned as a first step toward higher education for most students.... While a formal college connection represented official affirmation of the rigor of the Clemente Course, it also provided a direct link to one of the more traditional paths for escaping poverty – higher education.⁴⁰

She credits Shorris' theoretical contribution with increasing academic awareness of the problems related to poverty.⁴¹ While Connell cannot prove the efficacy of the canon as a weapon of resistance in the hands of the poor, she does substantiate her claim that he contributes a radical foundation for theorizing poverty by giving his "Weapon" article to her own non-traditional humanities students. Their responses confirm that Shorris manages to distil the 800 interviews he conducted for *New American Blues* into an accurate portrayal of the effects of poverty on the dignity and daily life of its victims.⁴² What Connell is unable to do is demonstrate a connection between Shorris' research and a use for the canon in defeating the surround of force. Instead, she emphasizes the difficulty of drawing a connection by claiming that critical pedagogues who follow Paulo Freire's example can only interpret Shorris' curriculum as "misdirected reform"⁴³ that cannot resist poverty.

She cites Peter McLaren's writings in critical pedagogy, wherein McLaren argues that an educational solution cannot include the traditional humanities because they "de-legitimate and disconfirm the lives of disadvantaged students," basically delegitimizing

⁴⁰ Connell, "New Romance," 22.

⁴¹ Connell, "New Romance," 23.

⁴² Connell, "New Romance," 23.

⁴³ Connell, "New Romance," 19.

the effort Shorris put into confirming the realities of the poor in *New American Blues*.⁴⁴

She also concentrates her reading of Freire only on examples where he argues that the poor must examine their own situation in the concrete present and assumes that is an argument against Shorris' use of the canon to frame the politics of the present as an historical moment in a broader narrative.⁴⁵ Connell examines sections of critical pedagogical writing where Freire and McLaren claim that the popular culture of the poor is necessary to their liberation, but she unfairly foregrounds them as examples of critical theory while not addressing important sections of their writing where they discuss the necessary uses of historical cultural artefacts.

Connell confirms the validity of Shorris' methods for theorizing poverty and the insight he distilled from them without giving the same treatment to McLaren or Freire. After all, she could have given their writing to her students and compared their reactions. Also, she does not add to, or compare, the evidence in Urban, Tardif, and Shorris that students of the Clemente Course and radical humanities identify moments from their own lives in the traditional canon, a contrast that would have given McLaren and Freire more context in a continuum of educational objectives from purist great books canons to subversive popular culture interventions. Neither does she contrast her interpretation of McLaren and Freire with arguments from Shorris, Johnston and Simpson, Urban, Tardif, or Endres that the canon does contain critiques that apply to the present historical moment of Clemente Course students, other critical pedagogy students, or her own non-traditional students. Thus her use of critical pedagogy as a pedagogical opposite to Shorris' liberal studies is accurate to the point that McLaren and Freire disdain certain

⁴⁴ Connell, "New Romance," 19.

⁴⁵ Connell, "New Romance," 19.

unnamed humanities initiatives, but her theoretical understanding of critical pedagogy is underdeveloped for the purposes of comparing Shorris' writing to McLaren and Freire. The ambiguity of her conclusions and her lopsided comparative methods would be cleared up greatly by analyzing a critical educator whose radical canon comes into contact with traditional texts and mixes traditional and non-traditional students in a setting that is close to Shorris' portrait of contemporary American poverty. In other words, bell hooks.

The most recent scholarly comparison between critical pedagogy and Shorris' pedagogy examined here is offered by Jennifer Ng. Ng received her PhD from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 2004 (the same university that Connell teaches in) and is now a Professor of Education at the University of Kansas.⁴⁶ Her article "Antipoverty Policy Perspectives: A Historical Examination of the Transference of Social Scientific Thought and a Situated Critique of the Clemente Course" is a scathing rejection of Shorris' theory of poverty, wherein she accuses him of dehumanizing the poor and claims that he overlooks the structural roots of poverty by reaffirming flawed government policies of the twentieth century. Therefore, she concludes, the Clemente Course can offer little or no advantage to instructors who wish to oppose their contemporary class structure.⁴⁷ She offers Paulo Freire's writing⁴⁸ and a radical humanities program at Antioch College in California⁴⁹ as alternatives to Shorris that she claims use a critical pedagogy approach opposed to his canon that demonstrate more awareness of the ironies of American public policy.

⁴⁶ KU School of Education, "Jennifer Ng," Kansas University, <http://soe.ku.edu/jennifer-ng/> (accessed August 16, 2009).

⁴⁷ Ng, "Perspectives," 42.

⁴⁸ Connell, "New Romance," 56. This is the same Community Humanities Education course that Shorris critiques in *Riches for the Poor*.

⁴⁹ Connell, "New Romance," 57.

The limitations that she puts on Shorris' potential to lead reform are already embedded in Shorris' own discussion of pedagogical purpose in *Riches for the Poor*. He is careful to explain that his Clemente Course is only meant to radicalize education and the political self-images of students and instructors, and does not extend into the domains of activism necessary to reform public policy. Shorris follows examples laid out by Robert Hutchins⁵⁰ and Paulo Freire,⁵¹ who both explain that revolutionizing education alone is only one important component of the activism necessary to reform society, since society may choose to reject the reforms that education succeeds in offering. The Clemente Course is restricted in that it does not influence public policy debates because Shorris himself carefully argues a specific scope for action, and not because he has confused a reaffirmation of prejudicial government policies for radical education.

Ng's discussion of the construction of impoverished identities draws upon sources from popular culture and scholarly advice to governmental policymakers, including members of the Rockefeller Foundation's Social Science and Research Council in the 1970s, which is one of the major original funding bodies of the Clemente Course two decades later.⁵² However, her argument rests largely on the similarities between *Riches for the Poor* and US federal public policy as explained by *Time Magazine* articles.⁵³ While she cites brief snippets from *New American Blues*, she neglects to examine over

⁵⁰ Robert Maynard Hutchins, *The Learning Society* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, 1968), 87.

⁵¹ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 2007), 49.

⁵² Connell, "New Romance," 48. Connell and Ng do not discuss changes in the Rockefeller Foundation's present policy suggestions or funding procedures.

⁵³ Ng, "Perspectives," 46.

100 pages therein that did not make the cut for *Riches* that include Shorris' own analysis of major contributors of public policy and the surround of force in the 20th century.⁵⁴

Her critique of the course itself delineates a few of the limitations of the truncated arguments made in *Riches for the Poor*, although some of her specific commentary is confusing. She claims that Shorris uses a “generalized monolithic group” that has too narrow a definition of “the poor” to recruit a diverse selection of students who suffer the effects of poverty. She finds the monolithic categorization of poverty “was limited by a process of self selection” that would narrow the sample of eligible students even further. Shorris eschews categorizing by race and gender, and Ng tries to make a case that his recruitment requirements are inadequate because they make no claims about racial oppression and patriarchy. She goes on:

The qualifications for admission to the Clemente Course allowed for a select group of students to participate.... [H]ow might the success of the course have been affected by serving a broader range of people in poverty?⁵⁵

At the beginning of *Riches for the Poor*, Shorris does construct a broad definition of “the poor” for recruitment purposes but “monolithic” is an inappropriate word for it. Each student could have a household income (whatever “household” might mean to their family or in their context) no higher than 150% of the federal poverty line, they had to be able to read a tabloid newspaper article, they had to be older than a teenager and younger than retirement age, and they had to agree to attempt to complete the course (which they would decide during an interview that allowed candidates to meet the instructors and ask

⁵⁴ Earl Shorris, *New American Blues: A Journey Through Poverty to Democracy* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997), 201-219. Each chapter in *New American Blues* also examines several different laws, initiatives or agencies, with their local or national historical contexts.

⁵⁵ Ng, “Perspectives,” 53.

questions about the course).⁵⁶ Using his broad stipulations, Shorris recruited a diverse first cohort of students. Some could barely read or speak English. White students were by far in the minority. Single mothers on welfare were recruited more effectively than any other visible group, even though Shorris concluded after the first year that single parents are almost impossible to assist in achieving their political autonomy because the intense stresses they face limit their ability to advocate on their own behalf.⁵⁷ There was at least one HIV positive student, and Shorris does consider illness and disability to be part of the surround of force. Some students were drug addicts, prostitutes, or homeless.⁵⁸ He also conducted Clemente Course classes in prisons. Ng does not explain why this diversity of students is too narrow for her definition of democratic or liberating humanities pedagogy. She also has no explanation of how a self-selected group of students (based on their agreement to try to complete the course) is limiting, or how the opposite of a self-selecting group could be democratic.

Later, Ng cites moments when Shorris attempts to theorize the effects of gender and race on the selection and retention of students. In those instances, she quotes Shorris' conclusions that the barriers to participation appear to him to be independent of race, and dependent on gender insofar as government agencies and families enforce their images of poverty on single parents. She interprets his observations as being based on less than serious investigations into "race, gender and class."⁵⁹ Overall, Ng seems to be trying to say something important about the ways that Shorris articulates his arguments but she fails to connect what can be problematic in Shorris' theoretical statements or his

⁵⁶ Earl Shorris, *Riches for the Poor* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co, 2000), 123.

⁵⁷ Shorris, *Riches*, 89.

⁵⁸ Shorris, *Riches*, 134.

⁵⁹ Ng, "Perspectives," 54.

administration of the Clemente Course to specific theories of gender or imperialism. Her failure to account for the diversity of Shorris' classroom or to state what is missing from his concepts of race, gender, and imperialism weaken her critique. Given how important these elements of North American oppression are to hooks, it seems as though hooks' formulation of the capitalist imperialist white supremacist patriarchy should have played a role somewhere in Ng's contrasting analysis between critical pedagogy and the Clemente Course.

Her alternatives directly reference one book by Freire: *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Although she quotes Freire several times, she doesn't explain how the quotations dispute Shorris. Perhaps if she had extended her discussion of Freire to include his writing about North American education or urban environments, the opposition she perceives could be clarified. Like Connell, Ng puts an inordinate emphasis on popular culture and immediate circumstances, as if Freire meant only to interrogate the immediate surroundings of the poor instead of enriching their understanding of their presence in their historical and wider ideological contexts. The only information she gives about the Antioch Community Humanities Education (CHE) program is taken from *Riches for the Poor*.⁶⁰ She does not test Shorris' claims about the CHE program, or note the difference between the on-campus nature of the Antioch program and Shorris' original Clemente Course.

⁶⁰ Ng, "Perspectives," 58.

The Relevance of a Comparison of hooks and Shorris in the Context of the Current Literature

There is no consensus from either liberal studies educators or critical educators that an updated version of Robert Hutchins' Great Books curriculum can either resist the effects of prejudice on those who live in poverty, or complement critical pedagogical theory. The authors all recognize that the Clemente Course has some sort of connection to critical pedagogy, but what that connection might be is difficult to reconcile with their summaries of Paulo Freire and the boundaries of elite and oppressed cultures. The vagueness of those connections is perhaps exacerbated because the multiple locations of radical humanities inspired by Shorris on campus, downtown, on indigenous land, in Canada, Mexico and the USA, have divided the discussion into multiple conversations. Further restrictions on scholarly debate so far have come from a tendency in the literature to admit only Shorris' theoretical contribution from *Riches for the Poor*, while limiting the definitions of critical pedagogy to narrow readings of only a handful of texts by multiple pedagogues, in the case of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* removed from the Clemente Course by over twenty years and entire continents. As well, without discerning between critical pedagogues who advocate revolution or reform, there can be no consensus over whether Shorris can inform even the most basic ambitions in critical pedagogy.

The broader research concerns of the secondary scholars suggest unspoken contexts for conversations about the Clemente Course and Shorris' contributions to pedagogy. US scholars are in part connected by their other research which is in often about Dewey, although interestingly Endres situates Hutchins and Shorris in opposition

to Dewey.⁶¹ Connell and Ng received their PhDs from the same program at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Ng earning her PhD while Connell was already a professor there. Their relationship to the same campus implies that the scholarship is part of other debates happening within particular college faculties, as Beyer predicts. Canadian scholars include MA students, and discuss Shorris' work not by analysing the Clemente Course, but on-campus radical humanities courses. More often Canadian scholars theorize radical humanities through interactions with students instead of the US scholars who theorize the Clemente Course through interaction with each other and critical pedagogical literature.

A review of literature that compares liberal studies to critical pedagogy leaves several questions unresolved. The authors recognize that there is some connection between the Clemente Course and critical pedagogy, but without offering specific examples of what the connection might be. The texts by pedagogues in liberal studies and critical pedagogy that commentators have chosen to analyze are completely disconnected from their locations in time and space. What would a critical analysis of location mean for the connections between the Clemente Course and a particular critical pedagogue? The sources that have been used to analyze Clemente have consisted of narrow readings of a limited selection of literature produced by Shorris and selected quotes from critical pedagogues, leaving the full range of theoretical writing and data unanalyzed. Critical pedagogy has been left basically undefined because of these disconnections, as have the concepts of canonicity and mobilization.

Comparing Shorris to hooks resolves these problems. hooks' corpus of cultural studies and pedagogical literature represents work by a contemporary of Shorris writing

⁶¹ Endres, "Reconciling," 62.

in the USA, with the goal of bridging the gaps between working class students and humanities college syllabi. Her writing is conscious of location, which invites comparison with Shorris' discussion of poverty's geographical and temporal problems in relation to classical literature and Socratic teaching. By confining the literature about critical pedagogy to a single pedagogue, hooks, the definition of critical pedagogy can be finely tuned to be represented by her work. By expanding the literature to span her entire career, connections can be made to some of Shorris' other writing as well, thus expanding the primary theoretical literature behind the Clemente Course.

American and Canadian Clemente-inspired programs such as Antioch's CHE program, Calgary's Storefront 101 and other radical humanities courses have allowed multiple scholars to take possession of Shorris' theory and develop their own concepts of poverty and the canon. Yet the interpretations of Shorris' writing have neglected important ways in which his theories of oppression are constructed similarly to reflexive theory practised by critical pedagogues. Urban, Connell, and Ng treat all passages within *Riches for the Poor* as though they have equal validity. Shorris does not. He wrote *Riches* and *New American Blues* as narratives that described his transformation from a well-heeled Jewish-American journalist looking for stories about poverty into a radical educator who travels to Mexico and Alaska to reclaim political dignity for the poor.

His journey begins with certain assumptions but ends with different conclusions. Three examples of how his basic assumptions about poverty and education change over the duration of writing *New American Blues* and *Riches for the Poor* will demonstrate that Shorris deserves a reading that pays more attention to his narrative than what he has received so far. First, he begins defining poverty as living in a household with a total

income between all members that is 150% or less of the federal poverty line, but he ends with a new definition that includes the working poor:

There were lies and confessions, crimes, pregnancies, and always loneliness. I argued with them about their possibilities.... [T]hey taught me to revise my definition of poverty. The federal guidelines were meaningless. People were poor who connected themselves to institutions that serve the poor: settlement houses, social welfare agencies, shelters, free clinics, gangs, minimum wage jobs, drugs programs, food pantries, soup kitchens. People are poor when they concede that they are poor, when there is no saving politics in their lives. That became the criterion for selection.⁶²

Second, Shorris argues for an indigenous context where the humanities cannot liberate the Maya if they are taught in the language of their oppressors, and when he went to a Mayan village to discuss setting up a special Clemente Course for their community, he accepted that the major negotiations be made in Mayan among the community members, despite his unfamiliarity with the language.⁶³ However, Urban and Ng both express discomfort with Shorris' attitudes toward imperialism and race, as though he dismisses those components of his surround of force. The narrative of his transformation into an educator suggests that imperialism and racism are concerns but that he thinks by theorizing about poverty he will better target white supremacy and help decolonize the Maya.

A third and final example of changes in Shorris' counter-hegemonic pedagogy comes from his ideal concept of logic, which is a comparative argument based on his personal encounters with the canon and with the surround of force. Shorris asserts that logic must be taught in a liberal arts program because syllogistic logic is valid or invalid regardless of the logician's social class, race, nationality, or wealth. He argues that the main texts of the western canon were developed using logical arguments, in order to be analyzed systematically and critically. Therefore, he argues that they are superior works

⁶² Shorris, *Riches*, 134.

⁶³ Shorris, *Riches*, 232-239.

of art when read in conjunction with Socratic dialogue between students and instructors, because logic transcends class, race and capitalistic hierarchy.⁶⁴ This may seem ethnocentric until his comparative ideal is complete. The canon is superior to the use of logical argument in, for example, the laws used by landlords and tenants, which welfare recipients cannot transcend because it can only be legitimately learned and debated by lawyers who protect the interests of their clients according to their ability to pay for legal services. Rental laws, though part of the present oppression of the poor, cannot politically empower the laws' victims.⁶⁵ Shorris is arguing that the canon, even if non-traditional students find flaws in its arguments about liberty or oppression, can be interpreted, interrogated, and applied by them because text and dialogical thought can operate without institutional barriers. In short, *New American Blues* and *Riches for the Poor* deserve a more careful reading if they are going to be credited as core sources of radical humanities.

The narrative structure of *Riches for the Poor* and *New American Blues* draws upon anecdotal evidence as well previous sociological and teaching literatures. Shorris appears to be experimenting with generative theory and reflexive theory with his journalistic interviews in *New American Blues*. All of hooks' writing from the 1980s to the present contains reflexive theory that charts how her perceptions and interpretations of domination and resistance change over time. Based on the way they each narrate their theories with their own experiences, hooks and Shorris use sympathetic approaches that draw Shorris closer to the theory of critical pedagogy than secondary authors have suggested.

⁶⁴ Shorris, *Riches*, 175

⁶⁵ Shorris, *Riches*, 54, 76.

None of the secondary scholarship studies the Clemente Course in Mayan, Cherokee, or Yup'ik territory, taught in indigenous languages with their own non-western cultural traditions.⁶⁶ Overlooking the indigenous courses in a situated critique that compares Shorris to Freire and McLaren risks limiting their critical conceptions of “pop culture” and “present situation” of the poor to exclude non-western traditions, histories and languages from the solutions to hegemony their critical pedagogies can offer. The omission of the indigenous Clemente Courses from critical discussions is unfair to critical pedagogues because it narrows their cultural relevance and omits an opportunity to analyze their pedagogies in the broader spectrum of cultural diversity and resistance that actually develops their teaching practices. hooks’ extensive discussions of colonization and the use of racial imagery to oppress and liberate students and instructors offers a concrete example of multicultural critical pedagogy for comparison, unburdened by the narrowness of Connell’s and Ng’s disconnected theorizing.

The comparison should not be limited to culture. The similarities between the locations of Shorris’ pedagogy and various projects related to critical pedagogy can be traced to Paulo Freire’s book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, but comparing Shorris to Freire based on only one of Freire’s books is unfair. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is a book where Freire theorizes his revolutionary teaching, which took place in the Brazilian countryside in the 1960s among “the oppressed” peasants in their own homes. Freire and his helpers lived with them and followed their progress toward armed insurrection. Freire’s work with the oppressed in urban settings in his later literature rarely engages the oppressed inside of a college, although there are relevant texts that could be used to study his

⁶⁶ Earl Shorris, “Can the World’s Small Languages Be Saved?” *Harper’s Magazine* (August 2000): 35.

pedagogy such as *Learning to Question: A Pedagogy of Liberation* (1989), *Pedagogy of the City* (1993), *Teachers as Cultural Workers* (2005).

Shorris needs to be recognized for making a transition from privileged space to teach in locations of poverty, much like Freire. When Shorris began to work in the Clemente Course, he did so by bringing texts with political arguments that were excluded from poor neighbourhoods into their spaces, where the students could take possession of them, legitimated in part by college credit on the one hand, but also by reinforcing the legitimacy of their space and their own study. In return, the students began to initiate Clemente Course instructors in their lives, by phoning them at odd hours to discuss domestic life.⁶⁷ Shorris mentions how a student named Abel Lomas asked him to accompany him to court when he was arrested for drug possession, and Shorris followed Lomas to police interviews and hearings.⁶⁸ A single mother enrolled despite her lack of child care, and brought her child to classes. Eventually her attendance became spotty and she died of AIDS, but her last months of life had a profound effect on Shorris' concept of his students and their obligations.⁶⁹

What these episodes show is that the humanities were radicalized in two ways. On the one hand, Shorris proves that the canon is not dependent upon colleges to be relevant to life. While Connell is correct that the great books canon might not liberate the poor, she overlooks the critique of the canon as a conduit for elite power and how criticism is connected to the transmission of power inside of college hierarchies. Shorris maintains that the canon can still be valid in the twenty-first century among the urban poor.

⁶⁷ Shorris, *Riches*, 145, 148.

⁶⁸ Shorris, *Riches*, 157.

⁶⁹ Shorris, *Riches*, 144.

Conversely, he also validates humanities pedagogy, and not merely texts. *Riches for the Poor*'s narrative is meant to radicalize instructors. What the humanities gain as an institution is a dialogical relationship with the cultures that are invented by the poor in their locality and their present situation. Shorris became a participant in their lives and they synthesized the humanities canon and Socratic dialogue into their own cultures and arts.⁷⁰

By contrast, none of the theory surrounding radical humanities has been directed toward explaining what the poor gain from going to campus that they would not gain from the college credit that Bard College awards students who are situated in their own communities. The policy decision to locate some radical humanities iterations of the Clemente Course on university campuses might conflict with the pedagogical theory that comes from working in a community center. Or an occasional shift toward university campuses might be neutral or helpful for studying humanities texts. After all, Shorris has given his personal support to on-campus radical humanities in Canada. Under-theorizing the effects of location on radical humanities pedagogy becomes an issue so far only when a comparison is made with critical pedagogy. Technically, if a humanities program adopts a narrow pop culture emphasis drawn from critical pedagogy as advocated by Connell and Ng, then the poor will essentially be coming to campus to see what elite educators have selected from their daily lives, isolated in their elite institution, and reflected back for critical analysis. Shorris assumes that the poor already are aware of their own lives and brings to them humanities content that is denied to them by the forces that support class hierarchy. In fact, Shorris suggests that the radical change the poor offer the humanities is the subversion of instructors' assumptions and challenging the

⁷⁰ Shorris, *Riches*, 145.

classical texts through engagement with the life and environments of the most destitute people in the nation. In Shorris' pedagogy, marginalized students teach the elite instructors how they interpret and challenge popular and high culture. Urban, Tardif, Connell and Ng all suggest that one of the most important justifications for the Clemente Course is that they receive college credit, a gateway to pursue a diploma, and the insight into their own lives that college professors can elicit. Urban and Tardif are the most radical authors in that case, because they have theorized ways that radical humanities students spur changes in universities. But radical change on campus does not mean radical change will occur downtown, for students or instructors.

What the discourse about radical humanities needs is the introduction of a pedagogy that attempts to explain what the poor gain and miss by entering the elite environment of college classes. Shorris' experiments with the Clemente Course offer an opportunity to analyze how a critical pedagogue like bell hooks uses a traditional humanities canon in critically informed education, by highlighting the contrast between critical pedagogy in a college and Shorris' potentially critical pedagogy in neighbourhoods. Endres, Urban, Groen and Connell identify sympathies between dialogical teaching methods in liberal studies and critical pedagogy. However, the comparisons of what radicalizes education could be made more useful by elaborating how teachers methodologies locate, identify and challenge oppression.

What the scholarship needs is a comparison of Earl Shorris and bell hooks. Their theories of oppression can inform each other's treatment of context, textual content, and illuminate how students and instructors might oppose domination and oppression together. Limiting the discourse about critical pedagogy to bell hooks centralizes critical

pedagogy with one of Shorris' active contemporaries in the US, while exposing Shorris to the contrasts in her diverse writing in feminism, cultural studies, popular culture and teaching.

Chapter 3: “Let the Engagement Begin.” A Comparison of hooks’ Capitalist Imperialist White Supremacist Patriarchy and Shorris’ Surround of Force in Relationship to Their Pedagogical Theories

Comparing Pedagogies

In their analyses of the Clemente Course and related programs, Landon E. Beyer¹ and Benjamin Endres² both suggest that liberal studies and critical pedagogy ought to be combined, but they also both express concerns over conservative college faculties probable objections to using critical pedagogy in their programs. Endres suggests concerns can be put to rest by revisiting the Clemente Course, and his argument can be expanded. However, some critical pedagogues also object to the great books approach to teaching and so the Clemente Course remains a controversial site for combining critical pedagogy and liberal studies. These objections might appear to take on added strength after a superficial reading of Shorris’ statements on injustices in American society. Shorris’ justifications of the canon contain seemingly reactionary responses to hooks’ categories of white supremacy and imperialism, as well as indifference to gender and clumsy historical analysis of patriarchy. Because his pedagogy is narrowly focused to address poverty, his theory includes several heavy-handed claims about the legitimacy of anti-racism interventions and decolonization. Those claims, while disagreeing with hooks at their surface, do not represent drastic opposition to hooks either at the level of Shorris’ basic conception of oppression nor in the pedagogy of the Clemente Course. When significant elements of hooks’ capitalist imperialist white supremacist patriarchy are

¹ Landon E. Beyer, “The Outcomes from Engaging Liberal Education and Critical Inquiry: Matrimony, Divorce, or Kissing Cousins?” *Philosophy of Education Yearbook* (2002): 69.

² Benjamin Endres, “Critical Pedagogy and Liberal Education: Reconciling Tradition, Critique, and Democracy,” *Philosophy of Education Yearbook* (2002): 59.

identified in Shorris' surround of force and his motivations for teaching, what might appear to be opposition between critical pedagogy and the Clemente Course will instead be revealed as unproblematic differences over domination, location, and canonicity. This chapter will focus on hooks' and Shorris' underlying theories of oppression and consider some of the ways that this is related to their pedagogical theories.

This chapter is lopsided in that hooks problematizes the traditional canon because she wants to decolonize the minds and emotions of students. She identifies various aspects of canonical literature that reinforce capitalistic and imperialistic control over culture, and experiments with more recent literature and arts that can resist the colonizing trends in college syllabi. In contrast, Shorris considers the use of the canon almost entirely as a solution to the political vacuum that engulfs the desperate poor. Therefore, hooks' arguments about pedagogy appear to be developing much quicker than Shorris'. This is because hooks has lived her adult life as a student, a writer, and a scholar who has worked at Ivy League and inner city colleges. There she has experienced college canons as transmitters of oppressive images that enculturate college students into the capitalist imperialist white supremacist patriarchy. Similarly, she has experienced oppressive teaching and formal classroom assignments that reinforce hegemonic power. hooks' theories of oppression address the classroom and canonicity as instruments of what she calls dominator culture, and therefore the part of this chapter about her will enter into pedagogical theory directly.

On the other hand, Shorris' *New American Blues* interviews reveal formal education to be a humiliating experience for the poor. His interviewees had typically been expelled from school or their teachers failed to retain their sense of purpose through the

end of Grade 12. *New American Blues* presents a vision of poverty that is literate without engaging literature as canonical. Shorris found that access to books made little difference to how literature and critical thinking were being applied. The right to critical thinking and the concept of literature as an inherited set of ideas that could be explored, rejected, or internalized is not a concept among the poor he encounters because their teachers simply do not transmit a framework for critical thinking or political dialogue to them. He found people living in poverty who read various books, even “high” literature, but he found no poor person embodying an image of a reader who internalized the political potential of politically engaging literature. Nor did he witness a canon of popular culture in the pedagogical sense, because they have to struggle for an image of a person who is rewarded for reflecting on the political, social, and other intellectual aspects of religious, popular, or folk cultures. While he found collections of popular culture genius, such as blues music, he did not find pedagogical contexts for it that would merit the sort of multigenerational dialogue that challenges and reinforces canonicity. Instead, he documented a culture that is bought and sold, thrust upon the poor without second thought, or the absence of dialogical culture. Shorris’ surround of force excludes a classical humanities canon from the poor.

The implication of his discovery is that the canon cannot act as a direct conduit of domination over the poor because they never come into contact with, for instance Shakespeare, as a canonical work regardless of how it is sold to them on reputation. The injustice related to the liberal studies canon is that it is absent, which does at least enable him to resist injustice by introducing some central texts along with dialogical thinking.

His argument frames Socratic dialogue as education with dignity instead of domination,³ and the canon as something that the poor are otherwise able to approach as instruments of liberation because there is no canon that dominates their political discourse in the first place. So, the comparison to hooks in this chapter will be somewhat unbalanced because she works with students who she argues can use canonical literature as instruments of oppression or liberation and she must facilitate them accordingly. The two pedagogues critique the ways that canonical literature is part of oppression but their arguments never actually meet in discussions about the same students or the same locations for learning.

What remains here is the question of what can be gained from comparing Shorris and hooks' theories of oppression. The capitalist imperialist white supremacist patriarchy is apparent in the surround of force and offers a more compact way to articulate its components. Being the product of a journalistic investigation of poverty in over 800 examples from around the USA, the surround of force anecdotally confirms hooks' relevance outside of privileged college spaces. The oppressive forces she defines in her film and cultural studies show up in Shorris' interviews. That suggests her reflexive theory models oppression in ways that are confirmable is beyond her own experience.

There is not enough space in this thesis to analyze all of the connections and disconnections between bell hooks and Earl Shorris. The burden of proof is to show that there are similarities between the ways they identify sources of oppression, that the terminologies they invent are not mutually exclusive, and that the goals of their radical pedagogies are either mutually supportive or else non-interfering. An explanation of each component of hooks' matrix will be accompanied by examples from Shorris' interviews

³ Earl Shorris, *Riches for the Poor: The Clemente Course in the Humanities* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000), 174.

in *New American Blues* to show their theories of oppression have substantial intersections. The arrangement of the (first) capitalist (second) imperialist (third) white supremacist (fourth) patriarchy is advantageous, although it is also accidental. hooks does not always list her categories in that order, but often enough when she uses the phrase she begins with capitalism and imperialism. She and Shorris share the most similarities in their theories of how capitalist constructions of culture define poverty, followed by the slightly fewer and more abstract similarities with how imperialism is an historical process of colonizing the content and locations of culture. Shorris and hooks both identify racism and some of its distorting effects on culture and the psyches of citizens, but they disagree about the potential to theorize an educational model that challenges white supremacy. Shorris and hooks differ significantly in what they observe to be patriarchal and how they theorize patriarchy. In fact, Shorris pays so little attention to feminist intervention that his pedagogy and even his journalism could use a complete radical feminist critique. That is not to say Shorris is unsympathetic, since he actually documents a tremendous amount of detailed events and interviews over the last four decades that have a significant relationship to issues concerning patriarchal society. He simply gives no analysis of masculinity, feminism, or sexuality even though his journalism could yield significant insights for a researcher who is willing to make the effort.

Capitalism

Shorris and hooks both apply sophisticated analyses of capitalist control over multiracial and multigenerational populations of the poor, over culture, and over significant contemporary events. In particular, they both discuss capitalist images and

living spaces that define poverty. As they near a more direct discussion of pedagogical interventions, they both critique interventions facilitated by popular culture and traditional canons in impoverished spaces. Sampling hooks' literature for signs of agreement with Shorris is straightforward since they both have produced work that is meant to intervene with capitalist discourses by way of counter-hegemonic observations and suggestions. hooks is famous for her contributions to anti-capitalist critical theory and an online search will yield numerous results for her work, but in case readers wish to pursue Shorris' other counter-hegemonic contributions they should consult the following works.

His books include *The Oppressed Middle: Politics of Middle Management* (1981)⁴ which explores how educated middle class workers are alienated and betrayed at the same time as they are promoted by corporate culture. In *A Nation of Salesmen: Commerce, Culture and Character at the End of the 20th Century* (1994)⁵ he examines the replacement of culture with selling. *The Politics of Heaven: American in Fearful Times* (2007)⁶ documents the people, arguments, and rhetoric used by the White House to expand conservative influence in the early 2000s. *Harper's Magazine* periodically publishes his articles in his capacity as a contributing editor and as part of their commitment as a national news organ to publishing liberal arts interventions in dominant political discourse. "New Philistines, True Conservatives" (1972)⁷ is a review of books

⁴ Earl Shorris, *The Oppressed Middle: Politics of Middle Management* (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1981).

⁵ Earl Shorris, *A Nation of Salesmen: Commerce, Culture and Character at the End of the 20th Century* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994).

⁶ Earl Shorris, *The Politics of Heaven: American in Fearful Times* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007).

⁷ Earl Shorris, "New Philistines, True Conservatives," review of *The Policies of Literatures: Dissecting Essays on the Teaching of English* edited by Louis Kampf and Paul Lauter; *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by

about liberal arts and dissent, including a vague but positive review of Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. "Cutting the Velvet at the New York Times" (1977)⁸ is about advertiser control of the news. "In Praise of Sheer Nonsense" (1978)⁹ reviews work by Hannah Arendt which had an effect on his theorization of *The Oppressed Middle*. "Market Democracy: The World According to Gallup" (1978)¹⁰ is about commoditisation of political support in lieu of rational debate. "An Eye for an Eye: Reflections on Equality" (1979)¹¹ offers some philosophical commentary on equality and equity in the USA. "The Hollywood Right: Outtakes from the Republican National Convention" (1980)¹² is a semi-satirical piece Reagan's ascendancy. "Reflections on Power" (1985)¹³ is a collection of aphorisms about hierarchies. "The National Character" (2007)¹⁴ argues post-Bush American politics needs to subscribe to Aristotelian concepts of political thought instead of governing through sales pitches and mass market polling. All of these works appear in *Harper's Magazine*, and excluded from this list are his articles for other news sources like *The New Leader*. This is because *Harper's* has contributed the most space to writing about the Clemente Course and Shorris is a Contributing Editor there, so it should yield a representative sample of his work. Clearly, issues related to class have been of long-standing concern to Shorris.

Paulo Freire; and *College Days in Earthquake County* by Leo Litwak and Herbert Wilner, *Harper's Magazine*, December 1972, 119-126.

⁸ Earl Shorris, "Cutting the Velvet at the *New York Times*," *Harper's Magazine*, October 1977, 102-110.

⁹ Earl Shorris, "In Praise of Sheer Nonsense," review of *The Life of the Mind* by Hannah Arendt. *Harper's Magazine*, August 1978, 84-86.

¹⁰ Earl Shorris, "Market Democracy: The World According to Gallup," *Harper's Magazine*, November 1978, 93-98.

¹¹ Earl Shorris, "An Eye for an Eye: Reflections on Equality," *Harper's Magazine*, May 1979, 103-105. Further study of Shorris' social justice theory might choose this article as the first major declaration of Shorris' antipoverty position as a journalist and activist.

¹² Earl Shorris, "The Hollywood Right: Outtakes from the Republican National Convention," *Harper's Magazine*, September 1980, 31-40.

¹³ Earl Shorris, "Reflections on Power," *Harper's Magazine*, July 1985, 51-54.

¹⁴ Earl Shorris, "The National Character," *Harper's Magazine*, June 2007, 60-61.

The goal of this section, however, is not a thorough analysis of all of this literature but rather a comparison of aspects of Shorris' surround of force with hooks' anti-capitalist theorizations, to ascertain the degree to which they offer compatible analyses of poverty. Because she is such a prolific writer, an aspect of hooks' critical theory that her critical pedagogy readership might not consistently encounter is that her interventions with capitalist lived realities signify a major change midway through her academic career. hooks prioritizes the power exercised by capitalist forces above the powers of the other components of imperialist white supremacist patriarchy in her book *Where We Stand: Class Matters* (2000),¹⁵ and the argument that she makes in *Where We Stand* represents a major juncture in the mid-point of her theoretical work. The premise of *Where We Stand* is that by the year 2000 there was no organized class struggle in America despite a widening gap between the rich and poor.¹⁶ Her previous books such as *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (1990) about imperialism, *Black Looks* (1992) about race, *Feminism is for Everybody* (2000) which theorizes the applications of her feminist cultural studies, make arguments about the coefficient powers of capitalist imperialist white supremacist patriarchy being equal oppressive quadrants of American society. Her book *Class Matters* marks her shift toward an intensified fight for distributive justice in the twenty-first century. Her theory of class therefore takes on a more urgent sense of priority than her interventions in the politics of gender and race. Her attempts to focus on problems of identity politics and problems of recognition become framed by her claim that "Race and gender can be used as screens to deflect attention

¹⁵ bell hooks, *Where We Stand: Class Matters* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

¹⁶ hooks, *Stand*, 1.

away from the harsh realities class politics exposes,”¹⁷ but educators like Shorris who pursue solutions to problems of redistributive justice and poverty in particular might use *Where We Stand* as a point of entry into dialogue with the rest of her cultural theory.

hooks defines personal, national,¹⁸ and transnational¹⁹ responsibilities to prevent discourse about race and gender from obscuring the capitalistic and imperialistic roots of class warfare. She refers to those roots as a technocratic, self-gratifying “politics of greed.”²⁰ “Greed is the oppressor within,”²¹ and hence her need for critical consciousness to help all citizens achieve a capacity for reflection. hooks radicalizes her own hope for social equity and distributive justice by acknowledging that at some point in American history wealth alone did not determine power and prestige, and she longs to return to that state.²² She interprets forces in popular culture and public policy that promote money as a measure of the success, in place of what could be and should be success measured by the equitable power that can come from recognizing more liberating sources of human dignity.

Her best anecdotal illustration of the barriers poverty presents to education appears in her autobiographical work *Wounds of Passion: A Writing Life*.²³ This scene from her married student life in Berkeley perfectly illustrates the simple oppressions that trap her:

Berkeley is the place I like the most, filled with bookstores and little clothing boutiques and places to eat. Berkeley is the place where it’s fine to be political, to be upset about racism, sexism, and

¹⁷ hooks, *Stand*, 7.

¹⁸ hooks, *Stand*, viii.

¹⁹ hooks, *Stand*, 6.

²⁰ hooks, *Stand*, 61-69.

²¹ hooks, *Stand*, 69.

²² hooks, *Stand*, vii.

²³ bell hooks, *Wounds of Passion: A Writing Life* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1997).

everything else that is fucking up the planet. We cannot afford Berkeley. We find a place in Oakland.²⁴

“Racism, sexism, [etc.]” contribute to her poverty, but the simple cost of living is a boundary between those who live in poverty and political dialogue about social problems and their solutions. The realities of life in Oakland conflicted with the images of middle class college life that she needed to conform to in order to join an exciting learning-based political dialogue in Berkeley. As an academic, hooks overcomes the barriers she experienced by helping change the image of a metaphorical Berkeley into a college that combines political engagement with material that is more relevant to working class realities.

There is some evidence that hooks might feel conflicted about what she leaves behind by crossing over into academia. In *Teaching to Transgress* (1994) she states that “It takes courage to embrace a vision of wholeness of being that does not reinforce the capitalist version that suggests that one must always give something up to gain another.”²⁵ She argues in all of her academic writing that capitalism demands that citizens embody a sacrificial self-image in their private and public lives. Her pedagogical writing is necessarily reflexive because the vision of wholeness that she aspires to is never quite realized in her friendships, her job, or her nation, where the reality is one of sacrifice to consumerism and capital. Her critical theory analyzes how Americans must give up time with their families or pursuing their own potentials in order to eke out the basic necessities of life by performing tasks for which they are paid the least possible wages. Therefore, if they want to measure their success by adopting a diversity of self-images,

²⁴ hooks, *Wounds*, 119.

²⁵ bell hooks, *Teaching To Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 183.

they must work harder and sacrifice more personal hours to make more money and conform to more manufactured images of success. Those images are bought, sold, and turned inward to construct the political discourse and the private interactions that she argues ought to be founded on a freer set of social choices.

Not all images are compatible because one is ostensibly supposed to be given up for another, and hooks clashes with the either-or demands of capitalist conformity. The stress to conform can be borne out in accusations of hypocrisy when her life appears to clash with her writing about poverty. For example, as a tenured professor she can afford to drive a nice car that does not break down often, but she is frequently accused of commodity fetishism because she does not drive the dumpy automobiles that victims of capitalist forces are imagined to drive.²⁶ Her private self-image is also conflicted, because doctoral research and college teaching positions are not traditional images that fit the stereotypes of her generation of rural black women.²⁷ In effect, hooks must choose between being a rural black woman and a public intellectual. She experiences the alienation of one or the other from academic critics, the mass media who interview her, and her own friends and family.

When she practices engaged pedagogy with her middle class or working class students, they are often engaged for the first time in critical reasoning about their home lives, which is a form of labour that is rarely acceptable in the commoditised images of the working class. Home is a recurring theme in her work that functions as one of the most powerful examples she has of a place where capitalism shapes materiality as well as “values, attitudes, social relations, and the biases that informed the way knowledge would

²⁶ bell hooks, Ice Cube, “Ice Cube culture” in *Outlaw Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 152.

²⁷ hooks, *Teaching*, 18.

be given and received.”²⁸ Home is not necessarily a safe place for poor people and her cultural theory is about the dangers that the capitalist white-supremacist patriarchy constructs in the private lives of citizens.²⁹

Meanwhile education, she explains, is sanctified in America’s oppressive regime by being removed and separated from the home. Individuals from undesirable class backgrounds must shed their class conceits and, according to hooks, suffer “psychic turmoil” that comes with being assimilated by exaggerated bourgeois manners like passively learning instead of challenging intellectual authority, adopting “elevated” language, meeting the requirements of frequent testing and accepting the fashions of the middle class.³⁰ She accuses black intellectuals in particular of betraying their revolutionary agendas in order to enjoy the power-related rewards of joining the dominant society by encouraging the assimilation of working class students, instead of adding curricula that address working class realities.³¹ According to hooks, the working class must overcome the antagonism of an institution that rejects its members’ commercially constructed personhood in order to enjoy the achievement that comes with a diploma and the other fulfillments of higher education.³² hooks considers college to be a place where the conceits of wealth are reinforced without rewarding teachers or students who could benefit from their education in more diverse ways.

²⁸ hooks, *Teaching*, 178. *Teaching to Transgress* opens up discussions about working class, middle class, and elite students reacting to the ways that their family households relate to problematic capitalistic institutions. The differences in her students’ economic origins and critical thinking are discussed in detail there. What matters here is that capitalist materiality is a barrier to the safety of home and school settings.

²⁹ For example: bell hooks, “Seduced by Violence No More” and “Gangsta Culture- Sexism and Misogyny,” in *Outlaw Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 128-144.

³⁰ hooks, *Teaching*, 182.

³¹ hooks, *Teaching*, 54.

³² hooks, *Teaching*, 179.

In summary, hooks has made suggestions that engaged pedagogy is part of a primarily anti-capitalist struggle to address the inequities of the forces that divide the working class from the rest of affluent society. Her reflexive theory is complicated by the fact that as the divide grows so does her distance from authentic relationships with low income individuals and access to a culture that she once shared but cannot be assimilated within the middle class social constructs of tenured professorship. After all, the images she encounters that separate the rich from the poor are reflections of a lived reality where the poor are separated from politically engaged locations. The central problem of her pedagogy is that in order to be educated low income students must cross the border and once they do so, they are no longer immersed in an environment that allows for authentic dialogue with what they already know, who they already are, or the cultures of whatever suburbs their college substitutes for her own personal Berkeley.

Shorris has not developed a way to authentically cross the border from poverty into an educated middle class space. His response to the inequities that capitalism forces upon the poor is to attempt to politicize their spaces. In order to achieve his goals he theorizes extensively about privations and oppressions in capitalist culture. *New American Blues* marks a shift in Shorris' approach to critiquing capitalism, from analyzing middle class oppression and elite politics in the 1970s and 1980s to returning to his own roots as a member of a politically active family in touch with poverty, first as part of the Democratic Party's activist municipal politics in Chicago when he was a boy and on the edge of the US border with Mexico during his teens.

Shorris states in *Riches for the Poor* that "The observer's distance from them transfigures the lives of the poor" and "the forces that act on the poor often come from

the direction of the observer. Attempting to look at the poor in what we think of as objective fashion...requires a certain arrogance and invariably leads to deceptions.”³³ The “we” in the last statement is meant to include Shorris and readers who wish to embark on a journey toward democratic enlightenment. He adds, “forces do not exist in the abstract,”³⁴ which according to Shorris, means that the gazes of wealthy individuals combine with capitalist myths of success and morality to create images that reinforce, constitute, or embellish the adverse effects of constant deprivation and oppression used against the poor. The gazes of his oppressors and “we” the wealthy are accompanied by concrete action that constructs multigenerational poverty. Shorris sees examples of governments and businesses classifying the poor as immoral, unintelligent losers and themselves as moral, intelligent winners, by using money as their measure of human worth. The wealthy create choices, habitats, and self-images for the poor and enforce them.

An example from *New American Blues* of the lack of personal choice in the surround of force appears in force number 8: “selling”. Shorris witnessed a family living in a dilapidated trailer that chose to pay \$399 for a television in the form of 16 months of \$40 payments (out of an \$856 monthly income), instead of paying \$300 to bring running water to the trailer.³⁵ Shorris explains the illogical decision by explaining that selling is a constant presence in the lives of the poor, as it is for all Americans.³⁶ He calls selling a force because the job of sales is to use every means possible to get a person to buy a product, and salespeople are always present, selling to the poor. Resisting selling requires

³³ Earl Shorris, 40-41.

³⁴ Shorris, *Riches*, 41.

³⁵ Earl Shorris, *New American Blues: A Journey Through Poverty to Democracy* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997), 130.

³⁶ Shorris, *Blues*, 131.

that the target audience has time to reflect on its choices, to consider options and prioritize resources. Shorris points out that the poor have no resources to prioritize unless the salespeople offer more, like a line of credit which is outside the limits of \$856 per month income. He adds that they have no time to reflect on decisions, and every space they occupy is invaded by selling. Because success is measured materially, Shorris laments that when the poor are simply too poor to buy anything more, they embody the image of failure.

Shorris also documents the powers that the US government considers legitimate in the second example of the surround of force, “public housing”.³⁷ He explores various government institutions and various facets of legislation and multigenerational poverty, but his analysis of public housing contains the most direct link between mass marketed perception of the poor and federal law. Shorris reminds his readers that

On March 28, 1996, President Clinton announced a ‘one strike and you’re out’ plan for federal housing projects.... Entire families will be evicted if any member of the family or a guest commits an act deemed criminal by the housing authority. ...Housing Secretary Henry Cisneros [clarified] ‘Public housing is not a right in the United States..., it is a privilege.’ ...Due process would not be necessary in evictions.³⁸

Shorris points out that public housing projects are frequently visited by the police because they contain the low income, non-white demographics of people with high rates of recidivism, which is fertile ground for prejudiced police investigations. One housing authority official told Shorris, “We can evict a family...involved in criminal investigations. If our investigations show this, *or if one of them is arrested*, we evict them.”³⁹ The layers of images that the law enforces in Shorris’ account stifle liberty. The poor who are objects of scorn are also profiled as criminal by the police who arrest them.

³⁷ Shorris, *Blues*, 101.

³⁸ Shorris, *Blues*, 104.

³⁹ Shorris, *Blues*, 104.

An arrest suggests the appearance of guilt, and the housing authority uses the appearance of guilt to evict its tenants. The “one strike” rule helps to create a physical location where the poor live that inscribes their vulnerability with an image of moral lassitude and swift correction from the outside world. Shorris adds that the government is not the only enemy of the poor in public housing, because agents reward snitches, turning the poor against each other with rumours and spies that perpetuate the prejudices of the government’s enforcers. Public housing is framed as a privilege connected to a capitalist hierarchy of wealth, where the poor are punished with imagery designed to construct capitalism’s own moral narrative wherein the poor deserve to be vilified.

Canonical texts and the Socratic method of pedagogy are also, for Shorris, unjustly kept away from the poor and given to the rich. In his 2004 *Harper’s Magazine* article “Ignoble Liars: Leo Strauss, George Bush, and the Philosophy of Mass Deception,”⁴⁰ which later became a chapter of his book *The Politics of Heaven: America in Fearful Times*, he explains that a common trait shared by most of President George Bush Jr.’s White House staff is time spent as students or instructors in the University of Chicago’s Great Books program or as a protégé of the program’s professor Leo Strauss, the self-proclaimed “political philosopher” who has mentored the most elite members of the US far right. He describes the Straussians as a misogynistic group of wealthy men who found sanctuary for their conservative radicalism on the most far-left campus of the mid-twentieth century. Their education with Strauss, as far as Shorris can tell, was spent developing an inscrutable cant for communicating with each other in circumscribed scholarly networks, so that they could consolidate their already influential family

⁴⁰ Earl Shorris, “Ignoble Liars: Leo Strauss, George Bush, and the Philosophy of Mass Deception,” *Harper’s Magazine*, June 2004, 65-71.

resources inspired by the most dictatorial aspects of Plato, Machiavelli, Moses Maimonides, and classical philosophy that the great books could provide.⁴¹

Shorris lists the lessons from the canon he believes the White House Straussians learned in Chicago's seminars. First, the best way for their government to maintain power would be to rule by communicating to the public only with contradictions, and to make sure that the government's actions were also contradictory, so that their own agendas could operate smoothly beyond the confusion of the public sphere.⁴² Second, Plato's doctrine of the noble lie is essential to democracies, because the general public is too stupid or untrustworthy to be governed with the truth. The noble lie as Shorris depicts it is a projection of basic human worthiness and unworthiness that justifies a handful of elite families that stymie political society with a culture of contradictions. Their power is assured by creating contradictory arguments and then arguing the worthiness of the binaries, so that by arguing against one image, the public almost has to construe an argument for the other. In the meantime the worthy elite can rule unimpeded.⁴³ Third, Straussians believe, according to Shorris, that the noble lie is just, because "not all men are created equal" which, Shorris explains, is a product of Strauss's rebellion against Robert Hutchins. Shorris contrasts Hutchins' claim that "The best education for the best is the best education for all" against Strauss's assertion that "Liberal education is the necessary endeavour to found an aristocracy within a democratic mass society."⁴⁴ Fourth, Shorris interprets Plato and Strauss as arguing for tyranny by redefining democracy as

⁴¹ Shorris, "Ignoble Liars," 67.

⁴² Shorris, "Ignoble Liars," 68.

⁴³ Shorris, "Ignoble Liars," 68.

⁴⁴ Shorris, "Ignoble Liars," 69.

“the rule of the wise over the unwise” with the wise defined as the aristocracy with a liberal education.

Shorris goes on to argue that the elitist, contradictory governments of George Bush Jr., Bill Clinton, George Bush Sr., and Ronald Reagan all took advice from the same cadre of Straussians, who gained their elite political philosophies at the feet of a scholar who was rebelling against Hutchins’ ideal education. Being elite themselves, the students were able to translate Strauss’s philosophy into acts of government. A limited but staggeringly significant example that Shorris offers is the US government’s lying about the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.⁴⁵ A much more subtle but long term example that he offers is the multigenerational discourse about humanities education that turns the public’s opinion against their own ability to apply historical argumentation to political decisions in a way that threatens conservative authority.⁴⁶ For Shorris, understanding the arguments over canonicity is central to understanding the roots of the highest echelons of elite American power.

Comparing only a few representative parts of hooks’ and Shorris’ literature about capitalist oppression, three common themes become apparent. First, they both seem to agree that capitalism creates images that entrap the poor and over-determine their personal identities. These images take the form of sales pitches, the distinctions between middle class and working class fashions, and a need to always surrender something to a more powerful person or institution that prevents a person from feeling wholly human. Second, they both seem to agree that the concrete realities of poverty must be overcome in order for poor people to act politically or think dialogically in conversation as

⁴⁵ Shorris, “Ignoble Liars,” 70.

⁴⁶ Shorris, “Ignoble Liars,” 70.

individuals who have the leisure to learn about society and reflect upon their options. Shorris' examples of selling and public housing illustrate how intense images of poverty and consumerism are tools that victimize the poor. The critical thinking promoted by hooks' engaged pedagogy is geared to disarm these images from a classroom location. Engaged pedagogy contains innovative ways of discussing consumerism and commoditisation that typically do not translate from home to school. College does not normally offer classroom spaces devoted to understanding the oppressive salesmanship that harms families or directs welfare agencies since those are essentially alien images by the standards of middle class ideology.

Third, there is the issue of the canon in the matrix of class, which hooks and Shorris do not disagree about directly, but perhaps remains an open question because their arguments about the capitalist influence on the canon are extremely different. hooks sees the university canon as another example of a commodity that needs to be bought. For her, the canon read in colleges is part of the political life for which students and instructors must trade away part of their wholeness, whether her students shed their working class attitudes and identities to conform to middle class fashion, or whether she herself must create a rift between her teaching life and her family and friends by entering a professional discourse that defines her personal politics. Shorris considers the canonicity of the great books to be fought over by two competing factions, with Robert Hutchins, Mortimer Adler and Socrates on one side, and Leo Strauss, Lynne Cheney and Plato on the other. In his interpretation, the twenty-first-century Bush Administration coveted the intellectual activity and political philosophy generated by engaging the canon using elitist Platonic methods. Thus explained, the conservatively educated elite would

support legislation and culture that turns the public away from developing its knowledge of classical texts and devalue political arguments by making them look worthless by favouring workfare and job training programs to fulfill industrial society's needs. On the other hand, the Straussians succeed in devaluing liberal arts degrees by connecting them to the policies of radical conservatism, garnering scorn from critical educators like Peter McLaren and Henry Giroux. Yet even though the humanities are devalued in public discourse and policymaking, the most powerful elite capitalists depend upon their liberal studies networks and political philosophy to maintain dominance. If this is the case, then all the ironies of US hegemony and its capitalist images must be understood by methods that include a dialogical interrogation of Plato. Critical pedagogues' criticisms of cultural canons, which can delay or dismiss engagement with classical texts, risk playing into the hands of their conservative opponents' way of thinking.

Imperialism

Shorris and hooks both identify colonial cultural incursions that comprise historical frameworks for modern poverty. The incursions they identify can be geographical legacies of conquering armies or cultural artefacts of class and racial warfare. In this regard, they differ in their critiques of canonicity. Shorris mistrusts popular culture and theorizes ways in which popular culture contributes to the colonization of the poor in their own spaces. He raises doubts about its uses as materials for socially just interventions. hooks is more concerned with the traditional canon's European authorship and the lack of sympathy for the reality of colonized lives that she senses in the humanities.

As stated in the previous section, hooks already makes a tremendous contribution to scholarship about imperialism. Shorris, however, is relatively obscure to academic audiences. Readers who would like to explore work beyond his pedagogical writing might access his writing about the ongoing Spanish, French, and English conquests of indigenous North America, and the subsequent Anglophone US conquest of indigenous and Latino peoples. His book *The Death of the Great Spirit* (1971)⁴⁷ documents the rise and failure of a generation of twentieth-century decolonization activism. *Latinos: A Biography of the People* (1992)⁴⁸ is a massive survey of various Latin populations in the Americas with a focus on the USA. *The Life and Times of Mexico* (2004)⁴⁹ is a national history of a colonized nation that he considers older than the USA and therefore to operate much differently. His journalism that has appeared in *Harper's Magazine* includes "Literary Life Among the Dinka" (1972),⁵⁰ a critically conscious book review of sorts, "The Circle of Revolution" (1973)⁵¹ which consists of seven interviews that document the contemporary legacies of Poncho Villa's revolution, and "Spanish Harlem" (1978)⁵² in which he documents the borough as struggling against the wretchedness of poverty. His article "Borderline Cases: The Violent Passage across the Rio Grande" (1990)⁵³ graphically exposes the violence in illegally crossing the Mexican-US border. As in the case of class issues, Shorris has devoted his effort and thought to documenting and understanding the multicultural and imperial realities of people in the Americas.

⁴⁷ Earl Shorris, *The Death of the Great Spirit* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971).

⁴⁸ Earl Shorris, *Latinos: A Biography of the People* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992).

⁴⁹ Earl Shorris, *The Life and Times of Mexico* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004).

⁵⁰ Earl Shorris, "Literary Life Among the Dinka," *Harper's Magazine*, August 1972, 104-107.

⁵¹ Earl Shorris, "The Circle of Revolution," *Harper's Magazine*, December 1973, 50-58.

⁵² Earl Shorris, "Spanish Harlem," *Harper's Magazine*, June 1978, 63-70.

⁵³ Earl Shorris, "Borderline Cases: the Violent Passage across the Rio Grande," *Harper's Magazine*, August 1990, 68-78.

However, this section is meant more specifically to determine if Shorris' concept of the surround of force contains examples of imperialism that are compatible with the critical theory behind engaged pedagogy.

hooks' critical analysis of imperialism is her reaction to the need for capitalist economies to constantly expand their territories to include valuable untapped resources and to expand their labour force to include previously untapped workers and consumers. She subscribes to a popular socialist narrative of history wherein European nations expand through war, police action and selling or buying the public spaces occupied by marginalized and indigenous peoples. Her resistance takes the form of cultural theory and teaching, in an effort to help people understand the damage that imperialism facilitates by conquering, displacing, and dividing societies. Her cultural theory also presents cultural options for conquered and displaced peoples, like the descendants of African slaves or the indigenous movements in North America, by producing new narratives in writing, film, and music that offer alternatives to imperialist dominator culture. Her discourse on imperialism follows many trains of thought, but to make the best use of the space available here the pedagogical implications for personal expression and canonicity in her theory will be discussed.

According to hooks, imperialistic institutions of teaching and learning must produce historical narratives that conform to the images of a conquered reality, and exclude alternative interpretations of history and society that might threaten hegemonic power. Their methods of teaching must transmit the legitimacy of war and domination, while limiting dissent to choices of action that can change the conditions of life but not threaten the hierarchy that elevates wealth and white maleness and displaces everyone

else. In order to sustain their domination over oppressed peoples, hooks argues that the representatives of dominator culture must force or persuade the oppressed to adopt the history of their dominators. Her teaching must interrupt the transmission of dominant history by adding oppressed voices to the narrative that authenticate new versions of history, or else by questioning the legitimacy of the political arguments in the dominant popular culture and canons that her students encounter.

The eight-page introductory essay to her book *Outlaw Culture* defines her approach to cultural studies as anti-imperialistic interventions. Because of how aggressively dominator culture argues for its legitimacy and dismisses alternative societies, hooks might appear to be surrounded by an impregnable set of oppressive images and institutions that render critical thought impossible. She offers cultural theory a way of “using everything we already know to know more”⁵⁴ about cultural artefacts and what they represent so that learners can “make the elaborate shifts in location, thought, and life experience”⁵⁵ toward decolonization. Decolonizing the minds of college students from multiple class backgrounds requires that hooks take up a radically pragmatic and diverse approach to canon:

The mixture of high and low, cultural hybridity, as the deepest expression of a desired cultural practice within multicultural democracy means that we must dare envision ways such freedom of movement can be experienced by everyone. Since the disruption of the colonized/colonizer mind-set is necessary for border crossing to not simply reinscribe old patterns, we need strategies for decolonization that aim to change the minds and habits of everyone involved.... The mind-set of neo-colonialism shapes the underlying metaphysics of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. Cultural criticism can be an agent for change...only if we start with a mind-set...that is fundamentally anticolonialist.⁵⁶

She argues for a hybrid curriculum that inspires fluidity between the cultures of the rich and the poor, between canons of high art and pop art. Her curriculum cannot be allowed

⁵⁴ hooks, *Outlaw*, 3.

⁵⁵ hooks, *Outlaw*, 4.

⁵⁶ hooks, *Outlaw*, 6-7.

to sustain the division of the oppressed and the oppressor, which means what is considered canonical cannot be treated as solely an instrument of domination. As she explains later in *Outlaw Culture*, what is high culture or “great books” material is capable of liberating location, thought and experience: “Many of the works that are canonically labelled ‘great’ are simply those that lingered longest in individual memory. And that they lingered because while looking at them someone was moved, touched, taken to another place, momentarily born again.”⁵⁷ She must therefore disarm the imperialistic nature of dominator texts to get at the root of their empowering potentials.

In the chapter in *Teaching to Transgress* titled “Language”⁵⁸ hooks summarizes the power of the canon to colonize nonwhites because the texts are constructed using European languages that are capable of violating “the most private spaces of mind and body.”⁵⁹ She argues that the context of ignorance in which many of the ‘great’ texts were written assumes that Native Americans speak little beyond “barely coherent grunts,” and these texts do not admit to the legacy of conquest and killing that was facilitated by rewarding European language speakers in the USA over indigenous and colonized language speakers.⁶⁰ Yet she does not name any of these texts or locate them in specific syllabi. Her example would be more concrete if she were to compare authors like Rousseau and Montaigne, or the degree to which they contrast with their respective social contexts. However, she is not arguing against specific texts but rather arguing that all western European texts are artefacts of global empires. Even if they provide clues that thinkers have for centuries struggled with a need to decolonize the European imagination,

⁵⁷ hooks, *Outlaw*, 27-28.

⁵⁸ hooks, *Teaching*, 167-175.

⁵⁹ hooks, *Teaching*, 167.

⁶⁰ hooks, *Teaching*, 169.

they are still written in the language of the colonizer and that is enough for hooks to remind readers that they reinscribe a quintessentially European debate.

Meanwhile hooks claims that for blacks, English is an artefact of African cultures being displaced, exploited and destroyed by the Atlantic slave trade. Africans were taken from regions with diverse customs and languages, divided from their families and neighbours, mixed up in cells and ships, then sailed to a new world where only one English speaking monoculture sold them as labour. hooks emphasizes that the slaves could not communicate with each other in their traditional languages, and therefore the culture of their new homes was entirely defined in English terms, and they were forced to speak English at the expense of their identity and history.⁶¹ As time passed, the African Diaspora in the Americas appropriated English and changed it to subvert the oppressive power of the colonizers' words, but hooks warns that the reinvention of English was dismissed as without genius or formal legitimacy in dominant society.⁶²

She argues that black vernacular is more permissive for those who invented and use it, with subversive epistemologies and ways of knowing.⁶³ In "Language," however, hooks worries that forms of the vernacular, such as rap, risk trivializing the politics and epistemologies of black language by turning them into commodity fetishes that profit from coolness instead of transformative imagination.⁶⁴ In academia, hooks experiences her own writing being returned by editors who change her words into Standard English before they can be published.⁶⁵ However, hooks may answer her questions about the

⁶¹ hooks, *Teaching*, 169.

⁶² hooks, *Teaching*, 170.

⁶³ hooks, *Teaching*, 171.

⁶⁴ hooks, *Teaching*, 171.

⁶⁵ hooks, *Teaching*, 172.

motives of her academic editors in “Language” in her introduction to *Outlaw Culture* with a passage that could be included in any examination of critical pedagogy:

Academics feel they are less cool if they attempt to link cultural studies’ intellectual practice with radical politicization. The desire to “appear cool” or “down” has led to the production of a body of cultural studies work in the United States that appropriates and rewrites the scripts and meanings of popular culture in ways that attribute to diverse cultural practices subversive, radical, transgressive intent and power even when there is little evidence to suggest this is the case.⁶⁶

This passage suggests that even within her own work, hooks cannot avoid tensions about when and where language and content ought to contravene or conform to the conventions of dominant culture and canonicity.

Shorris provides arguments that suggest popular culture, even in vernacular, offers no significantly less colonial message and might sometimes serve only to invent new ways to colonize space. During his research on relevant literature he has discovered what might be the first successful colonization of the popular indigenous imagination in the Americas by Europeans. He relays this first step to colonizing the mind in a chapter of *New American Blues* titled “Theater of Force,” which elaborates ways in which the poor participate in the culture as force rather than reflecting on culture in order to transform politics. According to his source, Ramon Gutierrez, in 1598 a Spanish expeditionary force surged west in order to conquer the indigenous Pueblos. The Pueblos had heard of the Spanish conquest and were prepared to meet fearsome warriors. The Spanish chose to fight with ideas instead of military violence. They did so by teaching already conquered groups to perform a play that idolized the Spanish and mocked indigenous culture as inferior and powerless. The performers thereby ritualistically inscribed their defeat and demonstrated their servitude, which Gutierrez argues the Pueblos accepted as an indigenous truth. And so, Shorris explains “the force of Spain became a part of Pueblo

⁶⁶ hooks, *Outlaw*, 5.

culture.”⁶⁷ Europeans learned to use popular culture to conquer their victims in ways that the victims themselves would imagine and transmit to each other.

Shorris asserts that “the Theater of Force resonates perfectly with the real world in the north Lawndale section of Chicago or in Little Creek” and goes on to explain that

.... In those places every person has seen the wounded, watched the police ambulances haul away the dead. Like the Pueblos who watched the Spanish pageant in 1598, they have heard the news, theatre means something.”⁶⁸

He suggests that poor people who know they are victims of force feel trapped by popular culture because they cannot move away from the represented places where they are hurt, or send their children to schools in less oppressive areas. He clarifies that popular culture’s violent narratives can be a “demeaning mirror” not because the poor are violent, but because they cannot escape the violent environment they live in, not even with popular arts and letters.⁶⁹

One of the surprising components of the surround of force is “graffiti” which Shorris describes is a sort of colonial practice where the poor colonize each other with threats of violence.⁷⁰ They are encoded messages meant to intimidate competitors who wander across claimed territory. Shorris theorizes that graffiti in small doses is merely violent, in that it is a threat but can be ignored. If it is ubiquitous, Shorris says it becomes a force on its own, “controlling the viewer’s perception of the world and its dangers, threatening.”⁷¹ He sees the creators as “artists” whose tags and threats compete “in destructive fashion, mimicking the warfare of the streets.”⁷² In case his analysis seems provincial and dismissive, he separates the illiterate masses who see graffiti as random

⁶⁷ Shorris, *Blues*, 91.

⁶⁸ Shorris, *Blues*, 93.

⁶⁹ Shorris, *Blues*, 92.

⁷⁰ Shorris, *Blues*, 128-129.

⁷¹ Shorris, *Blues*, 128.

⁷² Shorris, *Blues*, 129.

acts of vandalism from the literate poor who “live among the signs and survive by obeying them.”⁷³ Graffiti is unlike the movies that hooks examines, that come from multibillion dollar film studios and sophisticated distribution networks and media synergy. Shorris is examining the pop culture of the poor that is local, low tech, clever in the ways it is encoded so the dominant society treats it as non-threatening nuisances. The colonial power that Shorris sees among the poor is seated in the potential for local art to be subversive of the dominant culture’s political status quo and still replicate colonial violence and oppression in the margins.

As for mass distributed media, surround of force component number 24 is “media” in the sense of dominant culture. Shorris draws on the writing of Michel Foucault for some theoretical background⁷⁴ but he maintains fidelity to his interviewed sources instead of consulting secondary research to find images of poverty that appear in the news, with the example of crime reporting and fiction. “The reporting follows an immutable economically based rule,” he explains: “Treat crimes of the poor as routine crimes and crimes of the rich as extraordinary.” Instead of reflective political discourse, he cites “Cheap imitations of *Oprah* [in which] the poor appear as violators of social convention rather than the law. No rich people, nor any who live in the economic middle, come to display their infidelities and other sins before the leering audience.”⁷⁵ He argues that electoral narratives about overly permissive society and the need for more police and tougher laws are enabled by scapegoating the poor through these media representations. “Largely because of the media, delinquency has become the fate of the poor in America” according to Shorris, because “they have been judged in an exceedingly public trial by

⁷³ Shorris, *Blues*, 129.

⁷⁴ Shorris, *Blues*, 190.

⁷⁵ Shorris, *Blues*, 191.

the media [instead of] the family, the community, or even the state.” Judged to be guilty by association with low income stereotypes, the self-images of the poor are “a prison in the world [that] reproduces a prison in the mind.”⁷⁶

Another component of the surround of force, “helpers,” concerns a type of person who exists in colonized spaces. Helpers are people who subscribe to the moral authority of oppressive culture. By doing what is right by the mythic standards of dominator culture, they are free to deprive and oppress the poor as they will. Gifted with moral superiority, helpers lend help that makes them seem like winners and the helped like losers. He offers the common quote as an example: “I never give money to homeless people. I’ll buy food for them, but I never give them money. They just use the money to buy drugs or alcohol.”⁷⁷ Shorris warns that helping someone who is oppressed can become a means of control over them. It allows the helper to set limits for their already unfortunate charity cases. He cites school teachers as examples of oppressive helpers. “Schools for the poor” offer the same advice to everybody, to get a job no matter how menial, with no resources or willpower to educate further than “a trade...a cleaner...dig trenches...consider fast-food service an opportunity.”⁷⁸ He emphasizes that schools are colonial outposts for myths of capitalism and workfare because “at night the teachers take their headaches home to safety in the suburbs; the students stay in place. All the options belong to the teachers. That is the lesson they teach” under the impression that they help the poor.⁷⁹ Shorris identifies more people who add to the surround of force, but his discussion of “helpers” makes a certain lesson clear for anyone who wishes to analyse

⁷⁶ Shorris, *Blues*, 191.

⁷⁷ Shorris, *Blues*, 117.

⁷⁸ Shorris, *Blues*, 117.

⁷⁹ Shorris, *Blues*, 117.

imperialism. The minds of oppressors and the oppressed are colonized alike by moral justifications and good intentions. Shorris offers a warning that a solution which sets colonial limits for the oppressed is no solution at all. Reflecting on hooks' pedagogical concerns, imperialist culture seems to set limitations on people so that they can only imagine alternatives to their situation that are confined to the moral myths that created their problems in the first place. Shorris' theory of helpers is a theory of colonized minds that do not practice cultural studies as hooks envisions. Helpers act on what they know, but they do not combine their knowledge to learn more. Instead, they combine their knowledge to reinscribe what they already see.

Comparing hooks' and Shorris' examples of imperialistic oppression yields significant similarities and differences. hooks argues that poor black vernacular that is nurtured (or fomented) in marginalized spaces can be a more effective way of expressing herself than the dominant white, patriarchal discourses in English that most people are allowed to use in universities. But Shorris would have his readers pause and consider that vernacular is also used as a weapon of colonization and oppression. For Shorris, vernacular can also be turned against its users, bereft of political or liberating agendas: it can be imprisoning. Born into a poor black community, hooks has access to her vernacular, and as an elite intellectual insurgent she can reinforce the vernacular's power as politically liberating language. Shorris, who participates in the lives of his students as a visiting outsider, cannot legitimately converse in their local, racial, or embodied subversive kennings, but he can offer alternative examples of discourses. In the case of the Spanish conquistadors who appropriated indigenous theatre and left an insidious message in the pop culture of their conquered lands, Shorris sees reason to doubt the

liberating potential of popular culture as a tool of liberation. hooks also demands that she and her students intervene against the imperialistic pop myths that oppress them.

What Shorris and hooks agree on is that poverty is defined by more than a measurement of annual personal income. They both consider poverty to be a set of relationships between generations of people with longstanding social institutions in government, culture, and at home. The ideas that shape these institutions are connected to their historical contexts. Since the USA is a conquered land with a legacy of indigenous genocide and African and Asian slavery, they both find distribution of wealth, security, and political legitimacy to depend on decolonization. Shorris might challenge some of hooks' cultural studies theory with his analysis of graffiti, but not in a way that flatly negates her. His discussion of poverty reinforces the need for her to critically analyze the sources of graffiti and gangsta culture in ways that challenge the literacy of passive disconnected students who feel distant from the cultural transmissions of impoverished space.

Without showing an awareness of her work, Shorris does address issues that hooks raises in her essay "Language" and her attempt at a hybrid canon. He manages this by extending his argument about the colonization of the Pueblos beyond his discussion in *New American Blues* and taking actions that he reports in *Riches for the Poor*. By the year 2000, Shorris had used the Clemente Course's resources to help Mayan, Yup'ik and Cherokee communities assemble the historical components of their own cultural canons for use in indigenous humanities courses. Beyond those courses, the same reclaimed indigenous canons are also meant to offer cultural references for political debate, and in the Mayan case Shorris has seen reclaimed texts become part of a new political discourse.

The Mayan, Yup'ik and Cherokee Clemente Courses are the subject of Shorris' anti-colonial August 2000 *Harper's Magazine* essay, "Can the World's Small Languages Be Saved?"⁸⁰ In this essay, he writes that the Clemente Courses in the Yukon delta and on the Yucatan-Campeche border prove that small communities can revive languages on the brink of extinction. Research about Shorris' indigenous humanities is scarce. He does not write much about the Cherokee version of the course except to include its first syllabus in *Riches for the Poor* as an appendix.⁸¹ The most conspicuous oversight about the indigenous courses is that when Jeanne Connell⁸² and Jennifer Ng⁸³ wrote their articles critiquing Shorris for reinscribing imperialistic and capitalistic modes of domination in his curriculum and canon, they both cited *Riches for the Poor* but wrote nothing about the his indigenous engagements.

Nevertheless, these syllabi are crucial examples of Shorris' Socratic approach to arranging radical encounters with humanities canons. A few qualities of the indigenous communities stand out in Shorris' account. They are remote and must be reached by plane or boat for at least part of the year. The children are conspicuously interested in what the adults say and do. The communities discuss concepts of "souls" and human dignity as central to their daily life, and they attach these abstract concepts to more creatures than merely human beings.⁸⁴ According to Shorris, these are cultural values that help protect their environment from globalized capitalist society. Shorris also

⁸⁰ Earl Shorris, "Can the World's Small Languages be Saved?" *Harper's Magazine*, August 2000, 35-43.

⁸¹ Shorris, *Riches*, 255-260.

⁸² Jeanne M. Connell, "Can Those Who Live in Poverty Find Liberation through the Humanities? Or Is This Just a New Romance with an Old Model?" *Educational Studies: Journal of the American Educational Studies Association* 39:1 (2006): 15.

⁸³ Jennifer Ng, "Antipoverty Policy Perspectives: A Historical Examination of the Transference of Social Scientific Thought and a Situated Critique of the Clemente Course," *Educational Studies: Journal of the American Educational Studies Association* 39: 1 (2006): 41.

⁸⁴ Shorris, "Languages", 37.

hypothesizes that there must be some revolutionary urge for indigenous nationalism that foregrounds the indigenous language and its uses for native self-governance.⁸⁵ The revolutionary urge in indigenous communities is a significant difference between Shorris' preservation of an indigenous canon and the transmission of a liberal studies canon in New York City, where he believes revolution is highly unlikely to occur or even motivate the poor.⁸⁶

He found the Maya were motivated to construct their own humanities. In the late 1990s Shorris talked to a Spanish-speaking Mayan activist in the Yucatan about non-English possibilities for teaching and learning the humanities. Shorris was reluctant to set up a Mayan Clemente Course mainly because he was unsure if the humanities, as he interprets them as a lasting contribution from ancient Greek political life, could function in concert with non-western cultures. In *Riches for the Poor* he locates a Greek precedent for multiculturalism and morality in Herodotus and Homer.⁸⁷ Herodotus establishes Shorris' multicultural context in Greek political discourse by promoting a sense of social equality between Greece, African nations, and Asian powers. Shorris finds that Homer contributes to an Athenian version of multiculturalism by telling a story of conquest in *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* from the perspectives of the conquerors and the conquered peoples, with heroes on both sides and no trivialization of either culture.⁸⁸ Therefore, Shorris could accept that there are Spanish or Mayan humanities that could be taught with the same approach as the Western pedagogical category "Humanities", without also

⁸⁵ Shorris, "Languages," 40.

⁸⁶ Shorris, *Riches*, 39.

⁸⁷ Shorris, *Riches*, 231.

⁸⁸ Shorris, *Riches*, 231.

colonizing the Maya and conquering them through schooling.⁸⁹ His primary concern is to not colonize the Maya and to that end he makes a very hooks-like observation: “To adopt the role of cultural conqueror would be to inhibit reflective thinking, to destroy the political life of the students.”⁹⁰ Therefore, the Mayan program could not be taught in English or Spanish and their art, history, philosophy and literature would need to be Mayan.⁹¹

They renamed the Clemente Course *Curso de Alta Cultura Maya – Hunah Ku*, which means “Course of Maya High Culture – One God.”⁹² The first reading of the syllabus was the *Popol Vuh*, the key Mayan holy text, which at first they could only find in English and Spanish.⁹³ Mayan history has no record of “democracy” and therefore Shorris was careful to determine that the locals, and not himself or the Clemente headquarters at Bard College, should determine the nature of Mayan humanities.⁹⁴ The result is that the *Curso* remains a course in Mayan culture taught using the Socratic method in seminar groups, but that the texts are mostly indigenous.

The Socratic method is a pedagogical approach for the Maya but not a way of structuring their canon. Shorris describes how the course could not be taught in English or with a US political and institutional frame of reference. Mayan culture could not be engaged primarily in the form of texts containing dialectical arguments because their

⁸⁹ Shorris, *Riches*, 232.

⁹⁰ Shorris, *Riches*, 232.

⁹¹ Shorris seems to be making essentialist assumptions about US cultures and indigenous cultures. Further research or commentary on the indigenous iterations of the Clemente Course is required to gauge the sustainability of what is (at the outset) an essentialist means to cultural empowerment.

⁹² Shorris, *Riches*, 234. Shorris makes no comment on the monotheistic name of the course.

⁹³ Shorris, *Riches*, 234.

⁹⁴ Shorris, *Riches*, 232.

traditional society is structured around agrarian culture.⁹⁵ The rhythms and seasons of local agriculture formed the narrative structure of the Mayan myths. Therefore, the texts could not be analyzed and reclaimed without first exploring the daily work of the Mayan peasants, rather than Athenian philosophers.⁹⁶ Meanwhile, Shorris reports in *Riches for the Poor* that the language instructor for the *Curso* was teaching the language phonetically, also with references to the local agrarian life. Shorris does not mention the similarities, but his description of the *Curso* is remarkably like Paulo Freire's techniques for teaching literacy in rural 1960s Brazil.⁹⁷

Shorris concludes that by the end of the course the class was fluent in Mayan and translating the *Popul Vuh* into Yucatecan, the first step in reclaiming culture and constructing their own canon. As for the peculiarly Mayan purpose for the humanities that eluded Shorris at the outset, he was informed that the combination of history and language was able to satisfy the students that being Mayan was a source of social strength that helped to rebuild a community better able to survive and network with other villages after having taken possession of their past and reflecting on its relationship with their present.⁹⁸ Again, Shorris does not mention Freire, but the similarities between the pedagogy of the oppressed and the *Curso* could warrant further investigation.

A similar scenario plays itself out in Shorris' account of his experiences in Alaska where a Clemente Course was created to serve fifty-six Yup'ik Eskimo villages.⁹⁹ There

⁹⁵ The differences between metropolitan and agrarian life are reflected in Socratic texts, particularly Plato's *Republic*, *Symposium*, and *Phaedrus*. Shorris does not explain how he and the Mayan leadership settled on an agrarian description of the civic life of contemporary and ancient Mayan societies. Mayan critical theorists might for instance compare ancient Athens to Mayan archaeological sites and find a sympathetic role for political philosophers in their own contexts.

⁹⁶ Shorris, *Riches*, 237-239.

⁹⁷ Shorris, *Riches*, 238.

⁹⁸ Shorris, *Riches*, 239.

⁹⁹ Shorris, *Riches*, 240.

is one critical difference to the creation of the Yup'ik course that stands as proof that the Clemente Course is not an imperial project. The Yup'ik educators met with a Mayan educator and a local Spanish translator to interpret between them, rather than meeting with Shorris to determine if the course would be valuable. It was Shorris' own decolonizing sentiment that "We do not want the shadow of the white man over this meeting"¹⁰⁰ that determined that only indigenous participants would shape the course. The delegates agreed and the pedagogical methods and the curriculum were decided by the Mayan and Yup'ik activists together. Shorris writes that Bard College refused to grant class credit because the standards and oversight were too far from the Bard course's original objectives, so credit for the Yup'ik course is granted by the University of Alaska.¹⁰¹

Shorris situates the heart of a Yup'ik version of the humanities in an animist tradition. He suggests that in their traditions, all living things have a *yua* or soul, and knowledge of *yua* is transmitted through their stories and arts. Shorris has helped to decolonize Alaskan *yua* and culture. His anti-imperialistic efforts have helped to establish a humanities canon based on *yua*, where *yua* serve as the same conceptual focus as the life cycle of corn and the rhythm of agrarian society form the basis of the new Mayan canon and the Socratic philosophical traditions of ancient Athens and the modern USA focus the classical humanities canon.¹⁰²

By the year 2000, Shorris' writing began advocating a humanities approach to decolonization that is experimental in ways that agree with hooks' decolonizing strategies and her call for non-European voices. Where hooks and Shorris differ is that Shorris

¹⁰⁰ Shorris, *Riches*, 242.

¹⁰¹ Shorris, *Riches*, 242. I have not been able to confirm whether this program still exists.

¹⁰² Shorris, *Riches*, 250.

continues to advocate a classical humanities teaching model based on dialogical thought that began with Socrates, whereas hooks interrogates her canon with critical theory and questioning that she is still inventing with reflexive theory and her students' generated theory. Shorris and hooks are not pursuing the same project, given that the differences between Socrates and critical theory can be significant, and that the differences between a canon that is already written for classical humanities and one still being created for hooks' engaged pedagogy and Shorris' indigenous initiatives are obviously extreme. However, Shorris' indigenous interventions in his concept of canonicity are clearly in accord with hooks' attempts at decolonization her students' inner worlds.

White Supremacy

As a public intellectual, hooks has made regular contributions to US public discourse about race in books, as a lecturer, and in television interviews. Her position is that of a black insurgent intellectual. For her, blackness can be both an imposed hierarchy that must be overcome and a source of diversity where she can find friendships and resources for personal renewal. Shorris does not make a similar contribution to confront racism in print, in lectures or on television because while he recognizes white supremacy as an issue, he does not find solutions by reflecting on his own Jewishness. Perhaps he does not apply reflexive theory to combat white supremacist culture in the US because he intervenes mostly in racism across the Mexican border and in the USA with Latino, Chicano, Mexican, Hispanic and indigenous peoples. His surround of force is therefore informed by racial tensions that are not largely related to anti-Semitism or Semitic reflexive theory in his books *The Death of the Great Spirit* (1971), *Latinos: A Biography*

of the People (1992), or his later book *The Life and Times of Mexico* (2004). His *Harper's Magazine* articles about racism include "Spanish Harlem" (1978), "Borderline Cases: the Violent Passage across the Rio Grande" (1990), and "Can the World's Small Languages be Saved?" (2000). His articles confront racism mostly as the product of capitalism and conquest.

Most of hooks' discussions of race overlap with her discussions of imperialism, because white supremacy is the product conquest of location, relationships, and ideas. Several of hooks' books are devoted primarily to racism, and all of her work includes reflexive theory or a comparative analysis of problems based on the experiences of racially segregated groups. Her requirements for racial equity consist of competing demands for separation and diversity. Her opposition to white supremacy can be divided into two spheres: that which is meant to change the private lives of Americans, and that which modifies classrooms so that schooling can transgress white supremacy. She observes white supremacist limitations on classroom space and personal space overdetermining the benefits of any sort of education. Educating to transgress white supremacy in her framework usually requires access to mass media outlets and the resources of a college.

In her 1992 book *Black Looks: Race and Representation* hooks locates white supremacy in white patriarchal "gazing" that defines wealthy space.¹⁰³ In her 1990 book *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* she interrogates the roots of the trepidation that marginalized individuals have in crossing the borders of those

¹⁰³ bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South end Press, 1992).

authoritatively white, masculine spaces.¹⁰⁴ She maintains that underprivileged children learn early on that they are punished for scrutinizing authority figures;¹⁰⁵ therefore, social spaces become places of empowerment or disempowerment.

Her case is argued mostly through an analysis of anecdotes from throughout her life. As a child she had to travel from her low income black neighbourhood to the low income black neighbourhood of her grandparents by walking through white neighbourhoods. Along the way, she was afraid for her own safety. She encountered white people on their porches who would stare with hate, communicating a sense of “danger,” of “not belonging,” and a lack of personal safety.¹⁰⁶ As an adult walking with fellow professors and artists, hooks has been subjected to “townies” who sass “liberals” from the university hanging out with “niggers.” In return, “liberal” professors and artists she knows have said nothing to oppose those racist epithets that target them as well as her, victimizing whites and blacks, privileged professors or not.¹⁰⁷ Meanwhile, some white jock college boys she has encountered use their leisure time to brashly take over public spaces while looking for exotic non-white sexual partners.¹⁰⁸ hooks interrogates social spaces, both public and academic, in example after example of representations that are concretized in the way Americans relate at college and in transit to learning spaces.

The intellectual requirements for racial equity may conflict with the location or relationships of learners. A curriculum that is aimed at combating her conception of white supremacist culture needs to be part of long-term, ongoing reflection that is supported by

¹⁰⁴ bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Toronto: South End Press Collective/Between the Lines, 1990).

¹⁰⁵ hooks, *Looks*, 1992:115.

¹⁰⁶ hooks, *Yearning*, 41.

¹⁰⁷ hooks, *Looks*, 61.

¹⁰⁸ hooks, *Looks*, 23.

the external community. However, hooks fears that the wounds caused by racist society come from multiple directions, so the healing of one sort of psychic pain might interfere with the healing of another. A clear example of conflicting approaches can be found in hooks' 1995 book *Killing Rage: Ending Racism*.¹⁰⁹ *Killing Rage* is focused entirely on racism and her personal experiences with race, mediated by gender, class, and colonialism.

Around *Killing Rage*'s thirteenth chapter, hooks critiques the white public reaction to the subtleties of black victimization. She points out that often when black people express anger with whites in general, or attempts to limit the power of all whites, they are accused of anti-white racism by the mass media. She makes an argument that phrases such as "blacks are racist too" indicates that people are in denial about how racism works. If white people only scorned blacks then they could legitimately leave blacks alone, and she surmises racism would be less of an issue in everyday life. Unfortunately, the US fosters a culture of white *supremacy*, and hooks explains supremacy means promoting, instead of merely tolerating, a culture of domination and subjugation.¹¹⁰ When blacks want to put a distance between themselves and whites, they are advocating what hooks calls "black separatism."¹¹¹ Black separatism is "an attempt to construct places of political sanctuary"¹¹² away from domination and subjugation.

Black separatism can subvert or capitulate to white supremacist demands found in traditional humanities, and represents a desire for culture that competes with equitable desegregated teaching relationships. hooks points out that there are black intellectuals

¹⁰⁹ bell hooks, *Killing Rage: Ending Racism* (Markham: Fitzhenry & Whiteside Ltd., 1995).

¹¹⁰ hooks, *Rage*, 154.

¹¹¹ hooks, *Rage*, 155.

¹¹² hooks, *Rage*, 155.

who claim that the xenophobia expressed in black separatism indicates deep feelings of inadequacy rather than rejuvenation. These thinkers go on to suggest to her that the need for space away from whites reinforces white control of “legitimate political space.”¹¹³ hooks acknowledges that the tensions of black separatism can be construed as a denial of an actively racist US culture, and debate about black self-assertion that risks conflating the promotion of white power with black sanctuary. She nonetheless asserts that some spaces for healing must exist away from white supremacist culture.

In *Teaching for Community* hooks credits her segregated poor, rural, black education with being a liberating education. Arguing that “Education as the practice of freedom affirms healthy self-esteem in students as it promotes their capacity to be aware and live consciously. It teaches them to reflect and act in ways that further self-actualization, rather than conformity”¹¹⁴ hooks provides a rationale for encouraging the creation of separatist healing spaces while also fixing the problematic aspects of desegregated society. She testifies that her segregated public school education was directed toward promoting healthy self-esteem in attentive students like her.¹¹⁵ During the US era of segregation, her education glorified individual achievement and acted as a conscious contribution to liberating an entire race, so that book-learning and black people were unquestionably compatible. Typical of the black parents were concerns that being too bookish would make girls weird, but hooks’ parents still expected her to attend an all-black college to continue to engage black thinkers.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ hooks, *Rage*, 155.

¹¹⁴ bell hooks, *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope* (New York, Routledge, 2003), 72.

¹¹⁵ hooks, *Community*, 68.

¹¹⁶ hooks, *Community*, 68.

Desegregation erroneously assumed that what black communities needed to be free is access to everything that white communities had in abundance. Academically gifted black students were then chosen from the mixed ranks of typical students and introduced to white intellectual conventions. In white intellectual spaces, black students no longer had the community of support for their self-esteem that they previously enjoyed.¹¹⁷

hooks' college and graduate school experiences allow her to find colleagues in Feminist Studies, African-American Studies, and Cultural Studies with whom to share "political resonance."¹¹⁸ More commonly she is alienated from university intellectual life because her non-white critical voice is treated as either a "quaint affectation" to be moulded into a white supremacist cultural image, or else she is considered a threat and met with negativity from her fellows.¹¹⁹ Skin colour and the historical differences between white and black voices become more contested spaces wherein intellectuals are encouraged to compete and dominate each other,¹²⁰ confirming for her that the insubstantial private relationships among white and black friends has a correlating gulf in professional and academic lives as well.

hooks has access to black separatist spaces. That means she has access to locations and relationships that Shorris does not. This difference might explain why she can frame race as part of a person's identity that needs to be healed, while he does not. However, his description of surround of force still presents problems of race as they affect the poor and can be linked to hooks' theories.

¹¹⁷ hooks, *Community*, 69.

¹¹⁸ hooks, *Community*, 72.

¹¹⁹ hooks, *Community*, 73.

¹²⁰ hooks, *Community*, 131.

Earl Shorris writes in *Riches for the Poor* that he prefers to talk about a diversity of cultures rather than talk about a diversity of races. He cites a dialogue¹²¹ between Cornell West and Klor de Alva that he moderated and that was published in *Harper's Magazine*, "Our Next Race Question: The Uneasiness between Blacks and Latinos,"¹²² as containing two arguments that make "race" an absurd concept. First, he points out that Latinos "can be of any race" because they belong to a linguistic heritage. Secondly, he advocates Klor de Alva's position that races are socially constructed divisions created to oppress and are too insidious to be used as sources of justice.¹²³

For Shorris racism plays a role in the surround of force, although sometimes he theorizes racism in confusing ways. In his discussion of welfare programs, he states that "Race may play a role in the tone of the delivery of welfare, but recipients and bureaucrats are now so often of the same race that racism cannot be the determining factor"¹²⁴ without making an effort to investigate the racist legacy that might linger in a diversely staffed welfare agency's policies and practices at the level of individual workers.

Still, racism is a part of almost every one of his narratives about the surround of force. Shorris also isolates racism as the twenty-fifth component of the surround. His focus is on what he interprets in the US context to be social construction of race. "Most racism in America takes for its objects blacks, Latinos, Jews, Arabs, native Americans, Asians, and people of the Indian subcontinent," he explains, and "in local variations,

¹²¹ Shorris, *Riches*, 82.

¹²² Earl Shorris, Klor De Alva, Cornel West, "Our Next Race Question: The Uneasiness Between Blacks and Latinos," *Harper's Magazine*, April 1996, 55-63.

¹²³ Shorris, *Riches*, 82.

¹²⁴ Shorris, *Blues*, 113.

Italians, Poles, Hungarians....”¹²⁵ He emphasizes paradoxical victims of racism by raising the issue of “Melungeons,” a group of physically Mediterranean-like people in Hancock County, Tennessee, who are actually lighter skinned than some “white” white-Cherokee families in the same county. Shorris observes the Melungeons are treated exactly as other victims of white supremacy, and that the local authorities publicize “the Melungeons who have managed to rise into better social and economic position...as examples of racial tolerance.” He goes on to say that “by almost any measure other than racism, there are no Melungeons; they exist only in other men’s eyes. But that has been more than enough to lower the quality of their lives and reduce their participation in the economic, educational, political and social life of the county.”¹²⁶ The Melungeons are trapped inside Hancock County by white and white-Cherokee descendants who oppress them, but the racist image of a Melungeon is nonsense anywhere else, confirming for him the inscrutability of a one-way projection of race.

Shorris reduces the problem of racism at its lowest level to imagery of something disdainful, much like being poor is a flaw in capitalist mythology: “Those who now suffer from racism face the possibility of looking into other men’s eyes and seeing themselves twice despised.”¹²⁷ Examples of twice-disdained victims appear throughout Shorris’ discussion of the surround of force. In his reports on “public housing,” the “AIDS capital of America” is synonymous with its large Haitian population.¹²⁸ In his section on “police” he discusses the Rodney King videos and the riots that erupted after the verdict was delivered not as an uprising based on violence, but on the mostly poor

¹²⁵ Shorris, *Blues*, 192.

¹²⁶ Shorris, *Blues*, 193.

¹²⁷ Shorris, *Blues*, 194.

¹²⁸ Shorris, *Blues*, 105.

rioters who empathized with the humiliation: “in delivering the verdict, the white jury showed its contempt for blacks and browns, changing the King case from violence to humiliation.”¹²⁹ In his section on “hunger” Shorris describes networks of destitute Jewish communities that form racial, family, or immigrant blocs that are half-isolated by the racial images thrust upon them, and half isolated by the ethnocentrist images they grudgingly perpetuate about the outside world.¹³⁰ In his section on “abuse” he explains the economic hierarchy of black and white farmers at the Memphis Cotton Exchange is “painful proof that racism was alive and well and largely unchanged in the Mississippi Delta.”¹³¹ He analyzes the racist surround of force that deprives non-white citizens of the Delta of opportunities to improve or forces them to leave the area, trapping families who are without options in multigenerational cycles of unhidden, unabashed abuse.¹³² From the Delta his journalistic inquiry progressed to a town called “Nigger Ridge.” When Shorris asked someone if it had another name, they said: “That’s what people call it. You can tell the place by the smell. There’s raw sewage running all over. Everybody who lives up there is sick.”¹³³ Shorris consistently encountered race as a second image as grotesque as class.

hooks and Shorris disagree about the value of conceptualizing race and equity. hooks has experienced opportunities for healing inside of contemporary social constructions of race, such as black separatist public spaces and blackness celebrated in culture and art. Shorris finds no healing opportunities born of the examples of racism that he witnesses in mid-1990s poverty even though he valorizes specific cultural

¹²⁹ Shorris, *Blues*, 136.

¹³⁰ Shorris, *Blues*, 179.

¹³¹ Shorris, *Blues*, 121.

¹³² Shorris, *Blues*, 123.

¹³³ Shorris, *Blues*, 124.

interventions such as those made at the Roberto Clemente Family Guidance Center. Nevertheless, what both she and he agree about is that white supremacy is a conduit for force to be exerted upon the poor. The civil rights that were granted along with desegregation have yet to materialize equity, with the result that whites tend to be affluent and socially empowered at the expense of non-whites. They also agree that in the USA, an image of local poverty is almost impossible without imagining an accompanying racial hierarchy. One of the more complicated facets of how Shorris and hooks theorize racist images is in their treatment of popular culture. hooks' writing focuses on film, music and literature that is distributed to wide audiences. Shorris' writing focuses on localized pressures such as national discourses on AIDS that relate the syndrome to local Haitian immigrant farm labourers, or a single county in Tennessee where racism is expressed in ways that are gibberish outside of the county.

Their research and teaching methodologies at least contain clues about why their interpretations of race, rather than white supremacy, differ. Pedagogically, hooks might be able to turn her cultural studies lens on the national discourse about AIDS and intervene against the hate projected onto Haitian farm workers. Hypothetically, a nationally distributed movie about the Melungeons would allow hooks to deconstruct their images and to leverage contradictions within the narrative to show its weaknesses. However, for Shorris, who is interviewing HIV positive Haitians on farms, the national discourse cannot be intervened in because neither he nor the victims are only observers, but rather they are participants at its heaviest pressure point. Shorris would be replicating the trap that he describes as the media contribution to the surround of force, wherein he would be providing a mirror of colonization that in his opinion would only show the

victims of white supremacy the realities that they cannot escape. Maybe hooks' desire to write new literature, and her methodology from cultural studies could assist a teacher who taught on the farms with the Haitian workers, but Shorris has a different skill set that provides alternatives to race in the form of reflecting on capitalism, imperialism, and choice.

Patriarchy

Shorris under-theorizes problems of gender and patriarchy in his pedagogical theory. Based on examples he provides, he obviously has a critical consciousness of power hierarchies defined by heteronormative pressures on gendered images in the components of the surround of force. Nonetheless, he does not elevate the conflicts that he witnesses in poverty and patriarchal images into a pedagogy that even nearly approaches engaged pedagogy or hooks' cultural studies theory. What hooks provides for an educator like Shorris who under-theorizes patriarchy is a theory of patriarchy that encourages the use texts as entry points for creating feminist counter-narratives in discussion. If a future educators wish to add a stronger feminist dimension to the Clemente Course they have enough material in Shorris' discussion of the surround of force to identify the need for a political intervention but they will need a more articulate argument than Shorris provides about patriarchy to connect the surround of force to the texts in a liberal studies canon. hooks articulates an argument that problematizes the lives of Americans, including those who live in poverty, with accessible entries into canonical texts from a feminist standpoint.

hooks' books about gender and sexuality call for radical change in the lives and households of all Americans. Her theory focuses on repairing the failures of the historical feminist movement: "even though some feminist activists rejected the idea that women should obtain power on the terms set by [patriarchy], they tended to see all power as evil. This reactionary response offers women no new ways to think about power."¹³⁴ In contrast, hooks tries to promote new ideals of power that facilitate participation and healing social wounds caused by a violently chauvinistic power ethic. In activism, hooks promotes shared tasks, consensus decision making, and internal democracy in order to fight patriarchal top-down power hierarchies.¹³⁵ Within families, hooks' feminism seeks to diversify ways of expressing love without gender hierarchies.¹³⁶ Those hierarchies are directly caught up the priorities of wage earners and the household means of production.¹³⁷ The coercive powers of hierarchy that oppress families and women's friendships differ along racial boundaries as well.¹³⁸ In order to make gender politics more just, hooks needs to affect the wealth of households, as well as the personal relationships of women, men, and children, with their entire community.

Her critical pedagogy is meant to facilitate changes in multiple social hierarchies, and therefore not necessarily to create purely feminist spaces within a classroom. She styles feminism inside the classroom as a critique of the dominating assumptions within texts. Women and men in her classroom are often disturbed by the claims about gendered power that emerge during her lectures and student-directed discussions. The sources of their disturbance could be personal experience, feminist theory, or the "terror of the

¹³⁴ bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center, Second Edition* (Boston: South End Press, 2000).

¹³⁵ hooks, *Feminist Theory*, 90.

¹³⁶ bell hooks, *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love* (Toronto: Atria Books, 2004), 135.

¹³⁷ hooks, *Change*, 93.

¹³⁸ hooks, *Looks*, 79-86.

newly free” that Shorris describes as gripping students who discover conflicts between their home lives and their educated critical thinking.¹³⁹ hooks’ feminist pedagogy could easily fit into Shorris’ framework as one of many ways to speak about the political alternatives. In *The Will to Change* she has a paragraph about the differences between patriarchal masculinity and her alternative feminist masculinity that could provide a feminist rationale for the surround of force:

Men who are able to be whole, undivided selves can practice the emotional discernment beautifully described by the Masai wise man precisely because they are able to relate and respond rather than simply react. Patriarchal masculinity confines men to various stages of reaction and overreaction. Feminist masculinity does not reproduce the notion that maleness has this reactionary, wild, uncontrolled component; instead it assures men and those of us who care about men that we need not fear male loss of control. The power of patriarchy has been to make maleness feared and to make men feel that it is better to be feared than to be loved.¹⁴⁰

However, most of her feminist theory is directed away from humanities texts and household life and toward feminist theory of the past. Her main critique of college feminism is that in order to be legitimated, feminist theorists turned to “metalinguistic” analyses that made their research inaccessible to untrained, unspecialized citizens who were not engaged with research on a daily basis. Their audience was limited to academics, which reinforced legitimate boundaries between women who could afford the leisure for cultural theory, and the working class.¹⁴¹ Her description of academic feminist authorship seems to actually explain how feminist scholars have contributed to the surround of force that entraps the poor through patriarchy.

Instead, she asserts that the purposes of education should be to create accessible feminist theory and to recover women’s history.¹⁴² She explains that feminism is for men as well as women, as a pedagogical tool to recover texts without burying them in an

¹³⁹ Shorris, *Riches*, 225.

¹⁴⁰ hooks, *Change*, 120.

¹⁴¹ bell hooks, *Feminism is For Everybody* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2000), 22.

¹⁴² hooks, *Everybody*, 20.

idealized politics. “Professors in women’s studies classes did not and do not trash work by men; we intervene on sexist thinking by showing that women’s work is often just as good, as interesting, if not more so, as work by men.”¹⁴³ And, most important to a discussion of Clemente, she writes: “So-called great literature by men is critiqued only to show the biases present in the assessment of aesthetic value.... These exposures were central to making a place for the recovery of women’s work and a contemporary place for production of new work.”¹⁴⁴ In other words, by applying a feminist critical analysis to texts that constitute historically masculine power, contemporary readers can go about the task of citizenship in a more liberated sense of power and with a great chance of liberating their immediate community. Her formulations of patriarchy and the construction of a feminist canon could reasonably be used as the foundations of a Clemente-inspired course designed to intervene not with merely poverty but patriarchy as well.

In contrast, Shorris does not discuss “feminism” in any of his articles or books. *Riches for the Poor* contains a discussion of what Shorris calls patriarchy, which is an ancient nuclear family at the roots of biblical civilization. He uses this historical form of patriarchy, wherein the male leader of a clan arrogates for himself all of the political freedoms of the other members, as an explanation of where the domination of women, children and political freedom for men originates. His discussion only leads into his description of single-mother families as the family structure furthest removed from applying reflection and dialogue in politics, because they must cope with persistent harassment from the surround of force with the least household resources. While his

¹⁴³ hooks, *Everybody*, 20.

¹⁴⁴ hooks, *Everybody*, 20.

depiction of patriarchy ostensibly is meant to show that the political evolution of western culture through the canon has progressively liberated women and men from a tyrannically authoritative patriarch at home, he never really draws a connection between canonicity and patriarchal family life.¹⁴⁵

However, he did encounter at least one example of a classical text intersecting issues of gender, family, and the government. One woman who was a Clemente Course student in prison broke down in tears during a seminar about Sophocles' play *Antigone*. She said that the play perfectly described her own anguish at having to turn her daughter over to the FBI for some reason. Shorris asked her to share with the class whatever she thought is real about the play's depiction of the power of the state in conflict with families but she demurred. She had difficulty writing about her reaction to the play as well because of the feelings of anguish it evoked in her, by Shorris' account. However, this episode in *Riches for the Poor* suggests that the classical canon does have potential sites for provocative feminist interventions.¹⁴⁶

The surround of force also contains examples of men who dominate the political choices of other men, women, and children because they must be feared instead of loved. The first component of the surround of force that he discusses, "drugs,"¹⁴⁷ is not so much about drugs as it is about domestic violence between a husband and wife, between teenage boys in gangs and their violent machismo, and the egos of men who use violence to avenge themselves. A woman he interviewed for his discussion of "neighbours" describes her husband after they got married: "He got possessive. Everybody had to go like under his command: You're my wife and you have to do this and you have to do that.

¹⁴⁵ Shorris, *Riches*, 89-94.

¹⁴⁶ Shorris, *Riches*, 141.

¹⁴⁷ Shorris, *Blues*, 99.

And if I didn't do it, he would get upset and he would go out drinking with his friends."¹⁴⁸ The emotionally unstable husband was unable to cope with himself, his wife, and children losing their home, or the intervention of a welfare agency. When the woman finally got her children back from the agency, her daughter had been molested in foster care, her toddler boy had been beaten, and the long-term effects of those violent foster families complicated their lives ever after.¹⁴⁹ In an example from "public housing" Shorris documents how a young single mother tried for months to get her landlord to quell an infestation of rats and roaches. The head of the local Housing Authority, Linda Johnson, noticed the prevalence of infestations that landlords would not control, but blamed the tenants: "The problem is the seventeen-year-old single moms who never learned how to keep house," she said.¹⁵⁰ Guiding her policies based on her imagery of single mothers, she instituted a process of counselling the young moms, inspections, and evictions.¹⁵¹

Despite his attempts to deal with issues related to patriarchy, *Riches for the Poor* is problematic because Shorris does not make reflective, analytical statements about feminism, nor related topics of gender, sexuality, or patriarchy. The result is an insufficient understanding of the goals of education from which he could derive a more interventionist syllabus or frameworks for experimenting with seminar discussion questions. For instance, he gives only two examples of non-heterosexual relationships in *Riches for the Poor*. In one couple's case, one partner from the lesbian couple is a student in the Clemente Course, but she is forced to drop out when the other partner beats her too

¹⁴⁸ Shorris, *Blues*, 132.

¹⁴⁹ Shorris, *Blues*, 134.

¹⁵⁰ Shorris, *Blues*, 105.

¹⁵¹ Shorris, *Blues*, 105.

often and too severely for her to continue. Shorris gives no explanation or alternative image of gay relationships or families.¹⁵² He laments the presence of abuse in his students' lives but has no pedagogical or articulated response that can help abused individuals return to the course.

Directly comparing the approaches of bell hooks and Earl Shorris to patriarchy is difficult. hooks formally theorizes patriarchy in the lives of her students and her own experiences, as well as in wider literature and history. Shorris recognizes that there are politically volatile images that influence the political liberties of women in particular, but he considers his shared experiences with students and his interviews to be part of the problems of poverty. Patriarchy for Shorris is a historical situation that he leaves uncritiqued in the contemporary context. What the surround of force needs in order to be more effective at addressing the images of women, public policy, and private households is a full analysis using texts like *Feminism is for Everybody* and *The Will to Change* to better situate and articulate the scenarios that Shorris encounters. Likewise, he offers some poignant narratives that he connects directly to government policies and troubling paradoxes of domesticity, narratives that could potentially fill gaps in reflexive theory like hooks'. That is work for another project.

Conclusions

This brief comparison of theories of oppression that are the foundations of the pedagogies of Shorris and hooks establishes similarities and sympathies between them. These similarities and sympathies are apparent in the language that they each use to analyze oppression, the location of their work, and their attitudes toward canonicity.

¹⁵² Shorris, *Riches*, 153.

The vocabularies of hooks' capitalist imperialist white supremacist patriarchy and Shorris' surround of force are unique formulations of oppression that can be considered interactively fertile for comparison and reflection. Both hooks and Shorris seem to differentiate the poor from the middle class and elite wealthy by suggesting that the poor can turn commoditised images of poverty against other poor citizens and apply negative images to themselves, but they are denied political power when they project images on the rest of society, who they must obey or fear. Members of wealthy society, on the other hand, can empower themselves by projecting dominant images on the poor. The extent to which the poor are vulnerable to prescriptive images is part of what dramatically separates them from the rest of capitalist society. Both Shorris and hooks agree that the success of imperial European culture is explicable in part by white society's colonization and commoditisation of non-white popular cultures, and therefore they must respond in some way to the stresses of capitalist imperialist white supremacist culture.

They differ in that hooks believes pop culture and mass media can both contain empowering genres of allegories and alternative vocabularies that come from the margins of colonized society. Although using these images and languages outside of separated locations runs the risk of making them hackneyed and colonized, hooks believes that she can interrupt the assumptions of students and the images in dominant culture by introducing her black vernacular into arguments that are otherwise owned by more wealthy, whiter people. Whether Shorris has taken the time to develop his own pedagogy using the Jewish, post-depression Chicago lingo, or the vernacular of Mexican border towns, remains a mystery. He does use his knowledge of colonial history to suggest that the popular culture and inner world of racial minorities are just as colonized as any other

element of conquered society. While hooks sees the secretive kennings of black culture as subversive when contrasted with traditional English wording, grammar, and textuality, Shorris remains sceptical. He asserts that without developing a sophisticated literary approach to reflecting on American political origins, the creators of a new black culture cannot interrupt the surround of force that necessitated the victims of the slave trade and their descendents create their own dialects in the first place.¹⁵³

Likewise, hooks believes that white and black women in particular can overcome white supremacy and patriarchy by forming friendships and sustaining conversations in text, conversation, and film in which they can discuss about their successes and failures at forging deep, loving connections to each other. Shorris, by contrast, identifies forces that keep the poor from sustaining any such conversation, let alone from sustaining a reasonable hope that the healthy relationships hooks wants to explore can be maintained for long: pitfalls, sabotage, and vicious competition between neighbours, helpers, family, landlords and tenants, all levels of government, and the police, insurmountable barriers motivated by government policies, rationed workfare and oppressive images. The social elements that hooks has experienced as she grows older and more successful financially

¹⁵³ One aspect of Shorris' argument that remains unclear is which canon he thinks citizens ought to know first. Should a poor black rural girl learn the historical canon of dominant US political thought from an early age? Is he content with her learning a vernacular to describe her body, her feelings, her relationships and critical thinking at home and later encountering the liberal arts? There seems to be no definitive answer even in the developing black canon. The obvious Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, while they provide examples of leaders whose critical thought was radicalized in vernacular and classical canons at different moments in their lives, are problematic archetypes for feminist and queer citizens. Meanwhile, hooks has already raised the point that the USA is home to a multicultural pop culture in her book *Outlaw Culture*, where girls of every race internalize the black vernacular at an early age. In the case of white pop culture icons like Madonna, girls' bodies, feelings and the images of human relationships are being defined by appropriated non-white vernacular, often before great books or democratic citizenship are even contemplated. Shorris could be clearer about what the reality reflected in *Outlaw Culture* implies for the reading of Hutchins' or the Clemente Course's syllabi. However, *Riches for the Poor* might contain passages that dispel the question altogether, most likely in Shorris' description of a course in sentential logic and critical thinking that ought to make sense in any vernacular, and facilitate dialogue regardless of language barriers. Yet that logic course does not exist in every iteration of the Clemente Course or radical humanities, which makes the pedagogical relationship of vernacular, text and logic too tricky to explore further here.

and in her career are the social capital that allow her to reasonably argue for more attempts at creating literatures, languages, and friendships that cross patriarchy and white supremacist boundaries. However, a student of hooks might turn to Shorris to understand that the practical limitations of hooks' projects stem from the discussion she begins in *Where We Stand: Class Matters*, where she suggests that her wealthy social milieu and the projects she pursues in tandem with her scholarship have separated her from dialogue with the poor. Shorris makes no direct argument against the kinds of dialogues that hooks wants to create using subversive, decolonized language. What he does theorize is an explanatory set of narratives that outline why hooks finds her subversive scholarly dialogue applies best to a theoretical discourse in wealthy academic institutions, and not realistically feasible for those trapped beneath the federal poverty line without access to academic discourses to provide a basis for generative theory and reflexive theory.¹⁵⁴

Locations play significant roles in how Shorris and hooks theorize poverty. Both of them clearly recognize that the living spaces of the poor are separated from the rest of American society. The locations of the poor themselves are normally hidden away from settings where one could normally find the dialogical critical thinking that hooks and Shorris both want to promote. Exiting the spaces of the poor means, for hooks, being a working class black woman crossing over into middle class and elite college towns. For Shorris, exit seems nearly impossible. Instead he offers dialogue and texts that can enrich the lives of the poor and help them to reconstruct their spaces to be at least negotiable.

They connect themselves to poverty-stricken locations in different ways. Before she went to college, hooks was a poor black girl and her reflexive theory helps to anchor

¹⁵⁴ Looked at another way, Shorris' discussion of the surround of force illustrates the material barriers and some of the nonmaterial barriers that hooks attempts to permeate with her books, such as *Feminism is for Everybody* (2000) and *Where We Stand* (2000).

her critical thinking in critical theory but also in her own transformation. Shorris has to participate in the life of the poor through some other means. He manages to use his journalistic inquiry as a way to enter the living spaces of the poor and government workers, their friends, families, and historical records. He accompanies concerned, critically aware social workers on their duties. He is asked by the people he interviews to wait around for landlords to appear, to accompany them to meetings with government agents, and generally he tries to help them by confronting the same people, rules, and ironies that they confront. Whereas hooks runs the risk of being continually alienated from her low income past, Shorris' critical approach to journalism runs the risk of veering away from reflexive theory and toward romanticizing his presence in slums and offices.

They both recognize that the poor are held inside of spaces that are defined by race. Both pedagogues identify multiple sources of the membranes around impoverished living accommodations and the content of the culture therein are defined by the limits set by white supremacy.

Since both of these educators apply the materials of liberal arts education to resisting the injustices of poverty, the canon – however defined – remains a central problem to both their theories of oppression and liberation. Neither hooks nor Shorris presents a canon as if it could be simply a body of texts or images. They both need to present a canon that responds to a body of cultural artefacts including texts, film, art, symbols, coded messages, experimental language, music, and so forth. However, things can only be canonical if they are engaged with rigorous argumentation and critical thinking in writing and in dialogical face-to-face conversations. In hooks' case, engaging a canon is problematic because critical dialogue is only accessible to students who agree

to the expensive terms of college culture. She would like to see popular culture of various sorts added to college syllabi but the use of popular culture, whether it is socialist, multicultural, feminist, or oppressive, still does not liberate her from the same interrogations that need to apply to traditional college texts. Shorris' examples, notably of Spanish conquest and the use of theatre and the popular imagination of indigenous groups, drives home the point that cultural studies are no less complex or no more decolonized simply because they propose alternative forms of canonicity.

Shorris argues that the poor lack access to powerful, dangerous, canonical literature not because they have no access to libraries or movies or music, and not because he considers the poor less able to think critically than college students can. Rather, he sees the source of their failure to recognize the politically charged potential of canons of great literature in the lack of support for tools that undermine the surround of force instead of reinforcing it. Because great literature, in his view, offers poor readers ways of reflecting on a life beyond the surround of force, Shorris sees in it a potent source for anti-poverty education. hooks, for her part, would like her students to join her in exploring western canonical texts in order to understand how culture has been used to colonize the earth, and to argue for something more, like problematizing the dichotomy of high, traditionally European white culture and low popular culture. Shorris must overcome the divide between high and popular culture by somehow intervening against the conservative narrative that justifies keeping the canon in the hands of the wealthy, while he also must offer some alternative to problematic local cultural canons like colonizing graffiti or the music that everyone in the neighbourhood already knows but that replicates images of the surround of force that they are already aware of. Even if

canonicity is central to their solutions, as solutions the canon of hooks and the canon of Shorris are difficult to practically apply in the spaces of colleges or community centers.

The reflexive source of hooks' capitalist imperialist white supremacist patriarchy and the journalistic methods behind the surround of force obviously result in different formulations of oppression as they relate to the social qualifications of literary canons. They also differ in how they formulate the appropriate pedagogical theory for teaching and learning in college or community locations. Nevertheless, their similarities between the surround of force and the capitalist imperialist white supremacist patriarchy outweigh their differences. With qualifications of the sort discussed above, Shorris and hooks' theories of oppression and their related pedagogies are compatible.

Chapter 4: Drawing Conclusions

General Conclusions

The scholarship about the Clemente Course includes a significant number of comparisons of Earl Shorris' pedagogy to critical pedagogy. At issue is the degree to which Shorris' analyses of poverty and domination match the claims made by critical pedagogues about poverty and the use of traditional literary canons in the humanities. Secondary literature about the Clemente Course tends to present critical pedagogy as though it is encapsulated by Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* which is set in Brazil in the 1960s, and a few quotations from Peter McLaren and Henry Giroux without concern for the contexts out of which their pedagogies emerged. This makes critical pedagogy seem all the more incompatible with Shorris' writing and teaching. Since the comparisons are broad and ambiguous, the scholarship should not be read as full-fledged comparisons between Shorris' pedagogy and critical pedagogy. Scholars are divided over how well the Clemente Course measures up to critical pedagogy. Groen, Endres and Beyer argue that the course meets the standards of critical pedagogy for a socially just intervention in teaching and poverty. Connell and Ng raise concerns that Shorris' theories of poverty and pedagogy do not meet critical pedagogical standards.

Comparing Shorris to hooks reveals several ways that Shorris theorizes like a critical pedagogue. In particular, he invents a unique vocabulary to theorize oppression, and his theories are based on narratives and a reaction to academic discourses very close to hooks' problematization of capitalism, imperialism, white supremacy, and patriarchy as oppressive forces, and her challenges to academic conservatism. They are most similar

when describing capitalist and imperialist oppressions and the characteristics of poverty and the ways that culture colonizes the poor. Given their similarities, Shorris is likely to meet the demands for liberating the poor made by other critical pedagogues when they analyze capitalism and imperialism. Shorris and hooks are both sensitive to racism and document white supremacy. Shorris' analysis of white supremacy as part of the socially constructed oppressions of the poor is similar to hooks, but unlike hooks he does not understand racial categories as socially constructed solutions or safe spaces for the poor. If hooks can represent critical pedagogy, then Shorris probably identifies racism in ways that are consistent with other critical educators as well, although his pedagogical solutions to poverty are probably different when they discuss white supremacy and racism. Last in hooks' matrix is patriarchy. Patriarchy as hooks understands it can be identified in Shorris' surround of force, but he does not theorize it as such.

The similarities between hooks and Shorris are crucial for the ongoing innovation of the Clemente Course. This thesis explores the differences between Shorris' off-campus engagement with the poor and the radical humanities programs on college campuses like the course at Antioch College in the USA and Lakehead University in Canada. That includes a reading of *Riches for the Poor* that is essentially Freirean. Shorris is a critical pedagogue in that he is not a tenured professor and that he ventures outside of colleges into the living spaces of poverty. There he helps people to engage literature that acts as a mirror to challenge their political (or apolitical) present. He is not engaged only in radicalizing the poor, but also in radicalizing the traditional canon. The canon he uses was compiled by Hutchins and Adler (in the form of the Harvard Classics and their college syllabi), because they found it would catalyze critical thinking and politically

empowering dialogue not in colleges, but in everyday life. Shorris re-radicalizes the canon by taking it away from the privileged spaces that have been claimed by conservative liberal educators and used it instead to subvert the oppressions related to poverty in the lives of his students. By removing the great books canon from august institutions of higher learning, he delivers them into the hands of the public, along with removing the material barriers between instructors and the lived realities of students. This is similar to Freire's original pedagogy of the oppressed which took place in rural Brazil as a component of a wider revolutionary movement. Freire was uncomfortable with tenured teaching positions and found they removed him from the oppressed populations he wanted to reach. He did not accept college environments as his own environment for critical teaching until he was exiled. In contrast, the tenured professorships held by hooks, McLaren and Giroux cannot be equated with Freire's exile, even though their experiences of oppression and their classroom interventions resemble Freire's. Shorris is not a critical pedagogue through his theoretical tradition but he might qualify as one through his activism.

Meanwhile, radical humanities programs in Canada resemble what is radical about bell hooks more than they do Earl Shorris. Tardif is quick to point out in her Master's thesis that Shorris supports the Lakehead humanities initiative in personal communications to the teaching staff, but none of his published writing reveals exactly what his position is toward on-campus teaching for the poor.¹⁵⁵ In *Riches for the Poor*, he says that he "gingerly" accepts the Antioch CHE course because he and they share the same conceptual opposition to capitalist oppression. His position regarding the Lakehead

¹⁵⁵ Suzanne Tardif, "A Formative Evaluation of 'Humanities 101 A Lakehead University Community Initiative: The Perspective of the Students'" (MA thesis, Lakehead University, 2006), 1.

course and other radical humanities might simply be an affinity for programs that are engaged in a pedagogical quandary over opening up college spaces and experiences to people whose poverty normally excludes them. As exemplified by Urban's¹⁵⁶ and Tardif's theses and Groen's¹⁵⁷ analysis of Socratic pedagogy, Canadian scholars are embracing radical humanities that include Freire, Foucault, Gramsci, and other critical theory sources more readily than Shorris does in order to examine ways that their non-traditional students can alter the cultures of college spaces. At the moment, pedagogues like Connell and Groen have said that they are inspired by Shorris but Connell especially concentrates on the Clemente Course as a bridge to college programming.¹⁵⁸ That seems unnecessary after this comparison between hooks and Shorris because hooks and Shorris address very similar theories of oppression. Radical humanities educators might be better able to design a more radical approach by acknowledging that they are inspired by Shorris, and because of his similarities to hooks, they can use her pedagogy to further their goals, rooting their radicalism approaches to emancipatory teaching in both pedagogues.

Critical college educators must also pay attention to Shorris' similarities to hooks. Certain claims about the impetus for humanities programs might need to be modified. First, the conservative trend to covetously horde classical humanities and dialogical discussion inside of colleges in order to create an American aristocracy is no longer acceptable as the primary reason that Socratic method and liberal studies are taught.

¹⁵⁶ Tracy Lorraine Urban, "The Lived Experience of Disadvantaged Students in a Liberal Arts Program: A Heuristic Inquiry" (MA thesis, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 2005).

¹⁵⁷ Janet Groen, "The Clemente Program and Calgary Alberta's Storefront 101: Intuitive Connections to the Traditions and Practices of Adult Education," *Convergence* 38: 2 (2005): 65.

¹⁵⁸ Jeanne M. Connell, "Can Those Who Live in Poverty Find Liberation through the Humanities? Or Is This Just a New Romance with an Old Model?" *Educational Studies: Journal of the American Educational Studies Association* 39:1 (2006): 15.

While critical pedagogues like McLaren are able to challenge the conservative traditions, so is Shorris. Shorris' surround of force is similar enough to hooks' capitalist imperialist white supremacist patriarchy that classical humanities can be reasonably considered to be a potentially anti-poverty decolonizing multicultural pedagogy. Furthermore, Shorris' anti-poverty applications for the Socratic method and the classical humanities canon should inspire critical pedagogues to re-evaluate their critiques of how that canon is selected and how it relates to their critical popular culture interventions.

Further Research

There is plenty of room for further discussion about bell hooks and Earl Shorris. The analysis in this thesis has looked for ways that Shorris' theory of oppression compares to bell hooks' theory of oppression. In particular, it has demonstrated that the capitalist imperialist white supremacist patriarchy is compatible with Shorris' social theory and that his surround of force fits neatly into hooks' critical vocabulary for oppression. The comparison could be reversed in a series of twenty-five short papers, with all four of hooks' oppressive quadrants identified in each part of the surround of force. These papers would help to better understand how critical theory could be applied to Shorris' interviews. That depth of analysis could even establish his methodology as critical journalism, a new way of formulating critical theory by a journalistic approach to other people's lived experiences and critical reflection on the journalist's own theoretical background and personal history. Shorris would be a good candidate for an experimental approach to critical journalism because his original journalistic goal to create a comprehensive image of poverty was synthesized into an activist solution that engaged

a wider community. Using Shorris as one primary example, critical journalism might reinvigorate the role of newspapers and newsgathering organizations as communities of researchers who can apply their understanding of social problems to participant action research projects, or to re-examine the potential for journalists to engage their work as deployed social researchers and social critics. What is convenient about combining critical theory and activism with magazine journalism is the built-in ability for reflexive critique that comes with bell hooks' treatment of popular culture. A population of critically conscious students of cultural studies could provide an excellent feedback mechanism of critique and action for a community of critical journalists.

In the meantime, the comparison of Earl Shorris' Clemente Course in the Humanities and bell hooks' engaged pedagogy is incomplete. The comparison between their theories of oppression only establishes that their teaching practices open up the potential of dialogue between liberal studies and critical pedagogy because their languages for oppression are compatible. There still needs to be a fuller comparison of their pedagogical solutions to social injustice. Such a comparison would concentrate on poverty and how they both challenge the myths of capitalism that they identify in government institutions, private households, and individual lives. It would also need to compare their reflexivity and how reflection on their experiences with students and their own lives translate into transformative classrooms.

Further comparisons could reveal more about the relationship between canonicity and the location of formal learning. Shorris claims that his classical humanities canon is subversive and opposes the capitalist hierarchies in the USA, but his pedagogy is limited to the public spaces outside of colleges, even if the operational support for the Clemente

Course is connected to an administrative network through Bard College. He argues that the classical canon is denied a role in the political lives of the poor, and therefore they are victims without recourse to political alternatives. hooks seems to agree that the images of political participation are discontinuous with images of poverty, but she also argues that who controls the spaces where those images are being transmitted is essential to what sort of political alternatives are available. She seems to argue that a desegregated white school does not allow poor black students many opportunities for critical thinking or politically empowered self-esteem, but she finds plenty of opportunities for those same students in black separatist spaces. The issue of political participation takes on new dimensions when it is connected to locations, because hooks would like to see the classical humanities canon redeveloped to include black voices, women's voices, and decolonizing voices that are part of texts that are still being written and experimented with in marginal spaces. The ways that Shorris and hooks address canonicity determines how they challenge dominator culture where they teach. Location and canonicity must both be explored in a comparison of their pedagogical solutions to oppressive institutions.

While comparing location and canons is likely to reveal opportunities for challenges, compromises, and even solutions to the problems that both pedagogues discuss, finding common ground over white supremacy and patriarchy is much more difficult. Shorris and hooks are easily identifiable allies when they both describe the nature of racism and the effects that racism can have on poverty and political life. At first glance, Shorris does not seem concerned with the impact of racism on the construction of great books canons, but his alternative indigenous Clemente Courses in Mayan, Yup'ik and Cherokee variations are proof that he takes racist oppression into account when he

constructs anti-imperialistic course material. Shorris, however, does not consider racial identity as a source of anti-capitalist power or resistance to the forces that surround the poor. Since hooks is eminently concerned with the ways that her identity with blackness and black communities can construct new literatures and deflect some of the harmful effects of capitalist hierarchy, she and Shorris seem in tension. A compromise between them might take the form of a pedagogical model that assumes a classical humanities canon necessarily stretches beyond the compiled classics of Robert Maynard Hutchins and Mortimer Adler and includes non-white and female authorship. A pedagogical compromise between hooks and Shorris or critical pedagogy and liberal studies would also need to address either Socrates or Paulo Freire as a model of maieutic dialogue or critical pedagogy to inspire critical thinking and reflection.

Patriarchy is even more problematic when considering the compatibility between the Clemente Course and critical pedagogy. Shorris' discussion of the surround of force contains many narratives that hooks' critical theory can define in oppressive terms as examples of patriarchal society in action. Shorris has no discussion of gender-based or sexist oppression per se. Instead, he connects all of the episodes he observes to conditions of poverty. His writing that is directly related to the Clemente Course includes narratives about domestic violence, single parents, homelessness, transience, and conflict with government agencies and law enforcement that all disrupt families and the potential for the loving relationships that men and women need to thrive. Considering that so many Clemente Course students are clients at shelters and victims of abuse, his theorization of oppression deserves a deep feminist analysis so that his pedagogical interventions can be directed at problems rooted in patriarchy. The potential benefits of the Socratic method

and traditional texts, or hooks' critical approach to reflection and popular culture, could support Clemente Courses in women's shelters and for members of high-risk families.

Even if a more complete comparison of hooks and Shorris is undertaken, the wider question of liberal studies pedagogues' relationship to critical pedagogues is still open to debate. For example, this thesis did not reveal a passage coming from Shorris that responds directly to Peter McLaren's critique of the great books. Shorris should offer one. Likewise, the response to McLaren that appears in the introductory chapter to this thesis is based on a contrast between McLaren's claims and the writings of other liberal studies pedagogues, Robert Maynard Hutchins and Mortimer Adler who represent a progressive thread in the great books tradition, and Allan Bloom, Harold Bloom, and Leo Strauss who represent a conservative contingent in liberal studies. More contemporary theorists who identify themselves as liberal studies educators include Benjamin Endres and Landon E. Beyer. There is an extensive canon of critical pedagogues including Paulo Freire, Joe Kincheloe, Joanne Wink, Henry Giroux, Kevin Lang and still others – including, of course, bell hooks. If a comparison between hooks and Shorris was able to confirm that they are more similar than the statements of a critical pedagogue like Peter McLaren might suggest, that does not mean a comparison between Adler and hooks, or Freire and Harold Bloom, would reveal the same mutual affinities. Meanwhile, critical pedagogues are constructing new cultural canons around Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Continued comparisons and contrasts between liberal studies and critical pedagogy will reveal further intricate historical dichotomies in North and South American education that affect political battles between the rich and the poor, the dominators and the oppressed.

This thesis suggests more questions than it resolves. The fertile ground for further research is facilitated by the dialogue over oppression that Shorris and hooks can inspire between their pedagogical peers. A comparison of how they analyze and address oppression is interesting beyond the bounds of the Clemente Course and radical humanities education. May the engagement continue.

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